Stranded

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Stranded

by wormsin

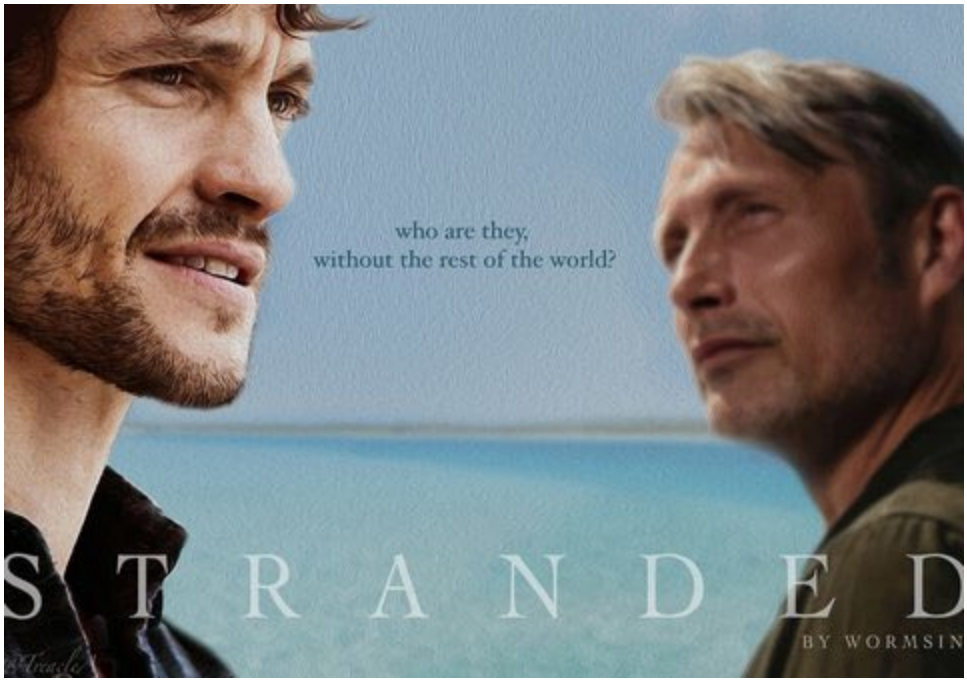
Summary

after the fall, the ocean wrecks their ship and spits Will onto a mysterious island. a story of survival and isolation.

who are they, without the rest of the world?

Notes

i don't know if this has been done before, but welcome to STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND, hannigram style. image header by @TreacleA !
say hi on tumblr



10.16.22
I always meant to write a final chapter epilogue for this, but I'm going to mark the fic as completed. epilogue will be a separate work.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

> *Will doesn't know why Hannibal doesn't lift him from the shore, where his body is being flayed. He twists more, but Hannibal's face is a shroud before the sun. Maybe he will leave him here to die. Maybe this is the last test: crawl if you want to live.*

The ocean eats him, and doesn't let him from it's maw. Salt scours, brine chokes, and the waves batter him to his core: edges weathered away to the smooth, dense truth. He is a human animal clawing at life.

Water is mass and force, heaving like a sick dog, and it takes everything away: no ground, no horizon, no direction, no name or past or anything save the sharp breaks of air. The ocean is, and the man is not. Eons pass without rest.

Finally she rears and spits the remains onto hard sand, rolling and dragging over the pulp. Everything is dark and wine-soaked in the dawn. Wet ground pushes up as the waves drag him back, and he is too tired to fight when the water breaks over him again. Barely conscious, the ocean pushes him idly up the beach until he stays there.

The sun rises, and burns his arms and legs, his back feeling sticky and heavy like too many layers of coagulating blood. The foamy water occasionally breaches his dry mouth. He is not quite conscious, only aware of the aching heaviness of living.

A shadow moves over him, and in that brief respite from the flaming sun, the first switches turn on. He is not alone. He tries to turn his head to the right, but his body is not obeying. Baked in salt. *Move.*

"Breathe," his company says.

He does; he wasn't quite before. It's difficult for his chest to fully expand. But oxygen gets into his blood and pumps through his body, and at last, he can move his head, like twisting a rusty screw. Eyelids break from their chrysalis.

White loafers greet him on the blistering sand. Hannibal wears a cream suit, like he wore in the church. His visage comes with a burst of relief, and it's not right, to be so relieved by the presence of this man.

"Crawl to the shade, Will," Hannibal says.

Will doesn't know why Hannibal doesn't lift him from the shore, where his body is being flayed. He twists more, but Hannibal's face is a shroud before the sun. Maybe he will leave him here to die. Maybe this is the last test: crawl if you want to live.

But Will is dead already. The cliffs saw him off and the ocean took him. They had to die.

Hannibal walks away from the ocean, and the sun blinds Will. He falls on his swollen, misshapen back. His chest is burning tight, but the ocean has taken all of his tears.

He is skinned, he is leadened, and Hannibal won't even eat his dried-out husk.

Will turns back onto his stomach and stares at the wavering darkness: a dense green mirage that towers before a sea of white sand. He reaches out into the heat and digs his way forward. One arm lances pain through his body, but that wakes him up and he presses through it. The sand seems to cut and his muscles scream, but he crawls and crawls. *If I reach the shade I can stop,* he thinks over and over, hips and feet pushing his corpse along. *If I reach the shade I can die* .

The dark doesn't seem to get closer. Will doesn't stop, because if he stops he won't be able to start up again. It feels like he's digging his own grave and dragging his own corpse all at once, but if he stops the ocean will take him back and that fear is alive in him.

The dense green begins to resolve into form: leaves, stalks and trunks. The ocean beats behind him, always. Then, the ground is more solid beneath him, and he falls into the cradle of shadow.

Will doesn't move, for a long while.

The sun has already peaked and bent away from the strip of beach by the time consciousness returns to him. His mouth is baked dry and his head is filled with a toxic, painful cloud which makes thought scatter away. Looking down upon himself he recognizes for the first time that he is wearing a life vest.

He didn't have a life vest on before the fall.

Nor does he recognize the clothes he wears beneath, coated in sand.

He doesn't know what happened after the ocean took them, but the thin-trunked trees that burst into vivid green above speak of someplace far from the Atlantic coast of the United States. He doesn't know where he is, and not remembering triggers a panic. The life vest is too tight on him all of a sudden, and he fumbles at the buckles as he heaves like a fish out of water, adrenaline shocking an already battered body. He tears at the last strap with a choked cry and kicks at the ground.

Hannibal's hand comes over his, and unbuckles the vest.

Will throws the damn neon-orange thing from him and curls around Hannibal's ankles, gasping up at him. Will can see his face now that they are free from the direct sun, and he looks stern. "Find water, or you will die," Hannibal says simply.

Will buries his face in Hannibal's shoes and won't let go. *Help me,* he tries to say. But Hannibal slips from his grasp like water and disappears between the fronds, and Will is alone again. Despair creeps in.

Water. Just focus on finding water. He can do that. Will uses a nearby tree to climb to his feet, and leans against it for several minutes while the world tips around him. Everything feels off balance, like he doesn't have his land legs back. Will takes tentative, barefoot steps forward onto the loam, and when his legs don't give out, he moves deeper into the jungle.

It's not easy to find water. Will has to stop every handful of minutes to catch his breath and ride out a wave of nausea. He walks between huge, flat leaves and tries not to trip over the twisted roots, the color of gone flesh. The jungle is loud and wet around him, buzzing and chirping with bugs and the calls of birds.

In the shadiest parts of vegetation, there is still condensation on the leaves. He sits down and laps at a the vein of a leaf as big as his torso, out of breath. He feels like he should remember something about this leaf but can't, and the frustration keeps him from standing again for a while.

It goes on like this for another eternity: walking through the jungle and pausing to sit with his dizziness and disorientation, licking the sweat from leaves until he can get up again.

He emerges first upon an inlet of the ocean, about 20 yards wide at the mouth, which disappears into a curve of the island's body. Will goes carefully towards the shallow edge that plunges into the water, clinging to the snake-like trees. The water is clear and teal, and alive with fish—food will not be as difficult to come by here. If the inlet meets a body of freshwater, Will can follow it to a source he can drink; but it might just as likely end in a beach or more ocean. Will can't see much of the island from here, or if there's a mountain inland beyond the tall trees.

Elevation will mean more resources, he thinks, but he doesn't know how long he can keep moving. There's something wrong with him, either extreme dehydration or something else, but his mind is too foggy to piece it together.

Will sits down to catch his breath. His heart is racing and he feels over-warm. The water mocks him with its azurine beauty.

He wishes Hannibal were here, and doesn't know why he doesn't help him.

Everything blurs, bright and swimming.

In the church, Will stands at the altar beneath the cross and a fresco of deliverance. He is draped in sheer whites that glow, gilded in the light. In his hands a copper bowl swollen with blood.

Hannibal kneels before him in the blood of the dragon's wings, basking in the wrath of his lamb.

Will pours. The blood cascades, slow, anointing Hannibal. Rivulets of crimson flow over his face, neck, and shoulders; and Will's visage is the terrible beauty of angels.

Hannibal drowns, and loves, and drowns.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> *Whenever he opens or closes his eyes from now on, Will shall be there. His sight, his consciousness, the panopticon of his existence is Will Graham.*

The first thing Hannibal sees when he wakes is Will. Whenever he opens or closes his eyes from now on, Will shall be there. His sight, his consciousness, the panopticon of his existence is Will Graham.

Will sits neatly postured in a corner chair of the small cabin, penning elegant notes into a journal. His shirt is tucked and his hair is parted and combed to one side.

Hannibal next sees the IV bag and the circular ship windows. His body is fatigued and floating with the dregs of painkillers. Hannibal reaches for his jaw and feels an unfamiliar growth of hair.

"18 days," Will says slowly. His own face is shaven. Impractical, on the boat. The way Will clicks and sets the pen down is like looking into a mirror. His cheek is stitched neatly but speaking is stiff. Healing well. Good boy.

"The sea thwarted your forgiveness," Hannibal says, throat dry. It comes out like gravel.

"We're not free from her yet." Will's eyes meet his, turbulent beneath the surface.

"How's my prognosis?" Hannibal asks.

Will stands and closes the short distance between them, and shows Hannibal the notebook. "You'll live," he says curtly.

Hannibal takes the book. It's Will's handwriting, but slanted and organized like Hannibal's notes. Dates, times, vital signs, symptoms and medications. It is immediately clear that Hannibal was very close to a different prognosis. "I don't recall the surgery," Hannibal says.

Will moves abruptly, agitated, to bring Hannibal a bottle of water. "You were awake for it. You instructed me," Will explains. He unscrews the lid of the water bottle, but doesn't let go when Hannibal grabs it. The edge of their fingers touch. The knob of Will's throat bobs, buoyed on tension.

"The bowel was perforated," Hannibal infers. Abscess explains the drains in Will's notes.

Will lets go of the water. He helps Hannibal sit up and props the second pillow behind him. It's painful, but Will's touch is a balm. Will sits on the edge of the bed, looking at the wall. His

weight is close, his back straight. "You showed me exactly where and how to cut you, and then I put my hands in you."

Hannibal drinks. The water is cold and heavenly. "Intimate," he says at last.

Will's lips quirk, but he keeps his eyes fixed ahead. "You don't remember."

"The mind protects itself from intense physical trauma."

"You came in and out for the first week. Delirious." Will looks at him then, furious. "You asked me to eat you."

"To carry me with you, always."

Will looks like he wants to strike Hannibal. Instead, he stands, smoothing the front of his pants, affecting disinterest. "I need to check our bearings. Don't get out of bed, I'll be back soon."

He leaves, but it doesn't feel like he has left. Hannibal turns his head, closes his eyes, and inhales. Will's scent is deeply embedded into the sheets.

Will follows the inlet slowly. There are occasional coconut trees among the mangroves, but all the fallen coconuts are very mature and he won't be able to climb up to the ones filled with water. He can barely trust his limbs to walk.

No matter how long he rests, his heart rate doesn't lower, and he's definitely disoriented. If he dies, the insects will make him part of the jungle floor. It feels like they're getting a head start.

But as the sun dips back towards the ocean and burns pink in the atmosphere, the water he follows becomes brackish. There is a freshwater source, and all he has to do is follow it. The going is aching, and he can only identify the pain he is in as crippling periods of *worse* and *not that*. Even in the cooling shadows he feels burned.

Thick greenery sticks to him as he stumbles forward; bugs fester around his head. Bitterly, he thinks that Hannibal probably found water hours ago and is lounging under a perfect castaways shelter.

Will's knees hit the ground and his hands sink into the loam. Hannibal didn't wash up on the same beach as him. For all he knows, Hannibal Lecter is at the bottom of the ocean—without him.

The thought is too terrible to bear, and Will can't rise again with it. His left arm twinges painfully.

After—after everything.

He did this. He took them over the cliff. But they were supposed to go together.

“Water,” Hannibal reminds him. “Follow the path ahead.”

“Don’t leave me,” Will grits out.

“Never, Will.”

When Will looks up, no one is there.

Will tastes the water on the air before he smells it. In this area there are slabs of dark, porous rock, and inland from his river is the slope of a tiered, small mountain. It’s almost a mirage between the high trees. Whatever storm brought him here collected on the summit and eased between the unknown topography to rejoin the sea.

It’s only a slow and small stream, trickling down from the rocks to the river, but for Will it’s salvation. He kneels in the mud and presses his face against ragged rock, gulping at the water. His mouth, tongue, and throat are remade, salt slackened off, making blood again in his crystallized veins. It’s cold and alive, and he can’t get enough.

He’s too dehydrated to properly cry but he sobs nonetheless.

Hours later, when it’s dark and his belly is bloated, Will lies on the soft earth and stares up at the eaves and stars above. It’s beautiful, this place that could kill him, and that feels appropriate. *Some of our stars are the same.*

Will can’t think about it, directly, and not just because of the fog and pain in his head. If Hannibal isn’t on this island, he’ll walk back into the ocean to join him.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> He has always had an affinity for bodies of water. They seemed to him to be the antithesis of humanity: alien, vast, godless; nature greatly untouched. There was no conquering the river, only learning to disguise oneself within it for a time.
>
> Frothing below the cliffs, the ocean seemed the only thing in the world that could contain Hannibal Lecter. Will wanted them to end at their bloody crescendo.
>
> But if he was alive, Hannibal could not truly be dead.

The night waxes and wanes in his consciousness. He wakes again and again to pain and the bright scatter of stars—they are his throbbing head, pulses of celestial eclipses, their light is his burning skin. There is so much noise, in this night, more than the little woods of Wolf Trap or even the bayous of his childhood. The jungle is ripe with sound: mostly insects and frogs, as the birds are asleep. The brush and bows shift, fruits and nuts and god knows what else crashing through to the floor.

At some point, Will crawls through the dark to his little stream and gorges himself again on water. Wherever the moon is in the sky, it doesn't do much here.

He wakes properly at dawn, cold and covered in dew. He finds a patch of burgeoning sun on the rocks and sits, staring at his surroundings. His head is more clear than it was yesterday, though it still throbs hard enough to make him nauseous; and for the first time, Will assesses himself.

He's in a moderate amount of unidentified pain. As he palpates himself, he categorizes. The back of his legs and arms are sunburned and scratched, but his limbs are otherwise in good working order. His chest is tight and a rib or two is broken, and it occurs to him that his breathing is more shallow than normal for that very reason. His shoulder aches, and he pulls back his shirt to see that the stab wound from the Dragon has scarred over, and the stitches are out. No signs of infection, but the damage is deeper, muscular; both of his shoulders, especially this one, have been abused over the years, and he can't lift his arm above his head.

His hands shake more than normal, which could be dehydration or some vitamin deficiency. He carefully touches his cheek, and finds that wound to be scared over as well. He can feel the ridge of it inside his mouth.

That concerns him: his scars tell him it's been a week or more since their fight with the Dragon and subsequent fall, but there's a big fat blank in his mind. They fell, and he washed

up on this shore. There must have been a boat and medical supplies—was Hannibal there, or did Will stitch himself? Did they wreck, or was Will thrown overboard?

His pride doesn't let him believe that he'd be so stupid as to sail them into a storm. But neither would Hannibal toss him into the ocean; at the least, it would be a waste. Will doesn't have defensive wounds.

He sighs in frustration. Whatever happened was obviously traumatic, or he has brain damage. The headache could very well be a concussion, which explains the disorientation and nausea. There's no use worrying over what he can't remember, when there are so many more pressing concerns.

Like survival.

It's difficult to focus, but Will knows he needs a plan. He has to find Hannibal. He could climb the mountain to get the lay of the island, or he could follow the beach. The mountain will be harder going but he'll find water more easily; the beach will probably be easier to traverse and he might find evidence of their wreck. If they wrecked, and Hannibal didn't discard him, or lose him in a storm.

Will had been wearing a life jacket, he remembers suddenly. He would have insisted that they both wear one if they were caught in a storm.

He needs to know; god, he needs to know if Hannibal is still alive.

Will is definitely not in Kansas anymore.

When he takes breaks from walking, which is often, he examines the bugs around him. He finds variations on katydids, white and black longhorn beetles, butterflies and a plethora of spiders. Of course there are mosquitoes as well, though Will is mostly immune to their stings from overexposure as a child. He recognizes leafcutter ants and praying mantis specifically, but most of the insects are not ones he is familiar with. Maybe if he found a carcass he would recognize the local species.

The plants he knows even less about, but they're certainly tropical. So is the weather, air already damp with the promise of more rain.

They—he could be in the Caribbean. Will would have suggested they sail south.

He's pretty sure there are few uninhabited islands in the world, and this part of the island is certainly deserted of any human interference. But an undiscovered island is near impossible. Someone knows where this is, even if he doesn't.

It takes all of the morning to get back to a beach, and when he does, he thinks that if he were in his right mind he would have gone to the mountain. But the ocean is the devil he knows.

The beach is hot, and has flies. Will sticks to the shade, scanning the beach covetously for a sign. It's beautiful but without meaning—there is no clue that he is headed in the right direction. He hates how often he has to stop.

There's a small, curved coconut tree at one of his resting points. He eyes the yellow fruit, and decides to go for it. Carefully, he hugs the tree and tries to plant his toes on the trunk, relying on his good arm. After a few attempts he gets a grip and crawls up slowly. His left shoulder screams in protest and it feels impossible to pull himself up, but he pushes from his feet and that seems to work. At the top he lays on his stomach and pulls at the young fruit; the leaves resist, and then with a satisfying snap the coconut falls. Will picks the others that he can reach and watches them hit the ground.

He slides down and collects his prizes, exhausted. One of the yellow coconuts cracked on landing, and Will smashes it against a rock to deepen the fissure. White milk spills, and Will collects it greedily on his tongue.

He drinks it all, and then breaks the fruit completely open to eat some of the meat. He can only manage a few bites.

The heat is thick and oppressive around him. His feet are sore and covered in small abrasions. So far the island's edge is soft and eroded, lifting in occasional, short cliffs heavy with vegetation. Will climbs a taller one to find himself on the tip of a large bay, curved like a sickle. The sand is calico, the ocean shallow and rippled with reefs. It's the largest chunk of the island he's seen at once, maybe five miles along, and there is no sign of mankind.

He climbs down carefully, and continues.

It's deep in the afternoon when Will spots a sign. The long beach before him is littered with more debris than the others, and as he approaches some of the driftwood resolves into raw shards of painted wood, freshly corpsed among old bones. Will turns them over and tries to remember into the varnished grain.

Further along are small buoys, rope. Then, gleaming opache in the black sand, is his second blessing. He drops to the hot sand before it and shudders in relief: an empty, plastic jug. The squeezing sensation that prefaces crying fills his sinuses, but nothing comes out.

He can gather all the water he needs for a day, with this.

Will collects his treasures at the base of a thick tangle of trees, and builds a marker on the dune before it. He wades into the tame waters fully clothed, stinging, cooled and groaning. He sinks down, heart racing again. Though the waters are tranquil, the fight to breathe is just under his skin.

He has always had an affinity for bodies of water. They seemed to him to be the antithesis of humanity: alien, vast, godless; nature greatly untouched. There was no conquering the river, only learning to disguise oneself within it for a time.

Frothing below the cliffs, the ocean seemed the only thing in the world that could contain Hannibal Lecter. Will wanted them to end at their bloody crescendo.

But if he was alive, Hannibal could not truly be dead.

“You’d carry me with you, and feed my hunger.”

The thought is bright as the day. Another not-quite hallucination born of their folie à deux. “I was afraid of becoming you, in Italy,” Will says, staring out at the reefs.

“We survived separation.”

“Less a separation than distance with entanglement.”

“You didn’t think of me, Will. Not like I thought of you.”

“Every day, I didn’t think of you. I carved out emptiness, to not think of you.”

“Can you live without me?”

For a moment, Will can’t find the horizon in all that blue. “It won’t be without you. Not this time.”

Will hangs his clothes to dry on the twisted limbs of the tree. White linen button down, white undershirt, grey fitted pants, blue boxers briefs. His initials are embroidered into the shirt and pants.

“So, you definitely had a boat ready,” Will muttered. “Or Chiyoh was in the wings.”

He doesn’t remember.

He rubs the embroidered initials under his thumb. He can’t stop, or look away from the fabric, sluiced with water and sun. For a dizzying moment, he thinks of drinking it.

Will pulls dead leafs into the shade of the tree and lies down. It doesn’t feel like he can get up again.

He summons the strength to get up again at dusk. The sky is bruised and spilling tangerine and violet, thick and dark with distant clouds. Wet rocks and shells are gilded, and Will feels bathed in the colors. Maybe that’s what resurrects him: Hannibal would dare to rise on the cooling beach, and survey the heavenly visage with a graceful turn. He would paint the walls of his mind palace with each detail. And then, when time destroyed it, he would always have his collection.

Will stood on shaking legs and stumbled into the fading sun, naked and worn as all god's creations that washed up here. He looked. Closed his eyes and licked his cracked lips, brow furrowed in concentration. He laid cement, rose scaffolding, put one brick down after the other. The sky, sea and land filtered through his eyes and into that space, impressionist phantoms dancing on the walls.

He turned to the island to take in the swathes of purple jungle; and there, to the southwest, breaking through the pink, was a column of smoke.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The cliffs smooth out to beaches; the rain moves on; the sun tips towards the horizon. His head is killing him. He drinks all the water from his jug and it makes a round sound when it hits his legs with every step. His shoes fully fall apart, and he ties the strips of cloth to his belt loop to keep them safe. He rests. Night falls. He moves on.

He's on a stretch of beach in the dark when he smells smoke.

Will gathers his meager belongings of rope and jug and follows the lick of smoke in the sky until the light peters out. Then, he walks along the beach like a dog after a scent, the beat of the ocean beside him.

The dark brings relief from the heat of the day, but it's been hours since he drank the coconut, and he's nauseous again. He should have spent more of today finding another source of water, and now he's wasting energy, but he can't stop. Smoke means fire means he's not alone on the island.

A signal in the dusk.

His legs are as heavy as the sand he steps in. Bats streak through the sky on butter soft wings. It's quieter on the beach than inland, with only occasional blips of insect sound or an animal shriek. And Will is exhausted enough that his thoughts are quiet as well. There's not room for much between the throbs of his blood against his skull.

Just a little further, he says to himself, and he'll see the flicker of fire. Just don't stop.

And then he can't keep going.

This is his world, now: walking until his body gives out, and then struggling to find the energy to get up again.

Will drags himself to the edge of the beach so the trees will shade him when the sun comes up. There's a new, biting pain in his bladder. He walks some paces away and unzips himself, wincing as he tries to piss. Not a lot comes out, unsurprisingly, and it burns, smells acrid.

He staggers back to the arbitrary spot of his rest. The bundle of rope becomes his pillow and he falls unconscious immediately.

Beyond the speck of a man on an island, the sky boils, and winds bend to currents of temperature. The moon is swallowed by thick clouds and all of a sudden rain spits out. It pours, shocking Will awake, and goes for hours. Will barely sleeps, and holds huge leaves in

a funnel to gather what rain he can, soaked and shivering, mouth agape to the rain. He strips and wrings out the rainfall from his clothes into the jug, over and over again.

When the rain lets up in the early hours of the morning, air thick with the promise of more, Will drinks from the dewy leaves, saving the precious water in his jug. He spends careful minutes squeezing out his clothes before dressing again, the wrinkled fabric hanging limp.

It's only later that he realizes the bladed edge of this gift: all the kindling will be soaked. There is no smoke signal to guide him.

While Hannibal waits for Will to return, he reads over the notes left in their shared script. It gives him insight into his condition, yes, but tells him so much more about what has transpired since the Dragon. In the beginning Will's handwriting is rushed, and entirely his own, jotting down the most essential instructions Hannibal no doubt dictated to him. Will has a spectacular memory; it's telling that he needed to write this down.

Then, the note taking becomes a practice and adopts Hannibal's mannerisms. Will did what Hannibal would have done if their positions had been reversed. Hannibal thinks that adopting his mindset was more than a matter of practicality. Their time apart has not weakened the synchronicity of their bond.

If Will is more like himself, then Hannibal must become like him.

Hannibal takes in the details of his surroundings and reconstructs them in his mind. This cabin is on the starboard side of the ship, the wall cradling his bed slanted out with the curve of the hull. The bedframe is elevated to accommodate storage, and everything else is built similarly. Although cramped, the furnishings are of quality. Chiyoh did well.

The chair in the corner is of matching wood and can fold up, padded with olive green. Hannibal embeds all the details from their earlier conversation into the carved wood.

When Will returns, he is still poised and precise, setting a glass of juice with a straw on the bedside table. Hannibal notices that his fingernails are trimmed. "Thank you," Hannibal says, and presses his fingers to the marks in condensation where Will touched the glass.

"I'm sure you can get creative with a liquid diet."

There's a sprig of mint in the glass. Hannibal takes a sip from the straw: the juice is not overly sweet, and Hannibal can taste how badly he needs these nutrients. "Maybe later I can attempt the sojourn to the galley."

Will returns to the chair. "It's well stocked. We can sail for a while before we need to port."

"Where are we headed?"

Will doesn't answer for a moment, considering. "Where do you want to go?"

Hannibal's response is immediate. "Anywhere your ship takes me."

Will fixes him with a shrewd look. "I could turn you in. Or feed you to the sharks."

Hannibal imagines Wil throwing chum to the waves; tying Hannibal up and lowering him slowly into the blood frothed water. That, he can envision. "It's far more likely that you'll kill me."

"You don't seem very concerned about that."

Hannibal gives a small shrug. "My feelings of self preservation are displaced, regarding you."

"To me, you mean." Will's emotions are opache. He crosses one leg over the other and smooths the line of his slacks. "You let me pull you off a cliff."

Us, *Hannibal thinks, growing concerned. "It seemed the appropriate thing to do at the time." Hannibal draws on Will's salted tone. Will's eyes widen and narrow, recognizing, perhaps, Hannibal's ploy.*

"What do you imagine will happen, Hannibal?" The question is spoken evenly to cover the bite behind it.

Hannibal thinks back to the last time one of them was bedridden. "I won't let you walk away from me again." Hannibal sips from his straw.

Will seems amused by that gesture at least. "If we're both alive, we're together then," he says, practical once more. "I plotted a course to Cuba."

"The papers are in the safe."

"You told me the combination."

"What do you *imagine will happen?"*

Will closes his eyes. When he speaks, each word is enunciated like taking care with sharp objects. "It would be easy to fold myself into your life."

"I've made a space for you."

Will looks at him. "Will Graham died on the cliff that night."

Hannibal doesn't believe that. If it was a death, it was also a rebirth. He imagines the sneer and curdling bitterness absent from the man in front of him. "Long live Will Graham."

Will reaches the end of the bay, and climbs up the cliff, watching his footfalls carefully. The rocks are home to bulbous leafed plants and darting, long-tailed lizards. When Will reaches the top he sits and drinks from his jug. The weight has been pulling on his injured shoulder, even carrying it with his good arm, but he doesn't want to drink too much at once.

From here Will can see that the next leg of his journey will be more difficult. The side of the island extending before him is rough edged, more short cliffs than beaches, and much is obscured from his view. He had hoped for another clear expanse of beach, where it would be easy to spot a fire pit. His stomach clenches unhappily.

It has to be Hannibal, out there.

Will sets off, climbing around the jutting cliffs and dipping into the inland vegetation. Bugs irritate him, flying too close to his ears and eyes and pricking his skin. He watches his bare feet carefully for something more nasty that could bite him, especially anthills. The forest floor is littered with yellow and brown leaves, and he often steps on sharp rocks or barbs and has a moment of panic. Mostly he encounters birds, colorful and talkative.

Will grows tired of tiptoeing on sore feet, and pulls huge green leaves off a tree and attempts to fashion a sort of sock for himself. While a few layers of leaves becomes thick, they don't tie well, and he has nothing to cut his rope into shorter lengths. He decides to tear off strips from the hem of his pant, and strips them off to worry the fabric with his teeth. The damn material is well made. Frustrated, he looks around for a sharp rock.

That's when he sees a huge tortoise staring at him from a sunny spot between the trees. It was hidden amongst the duller colors of the underbrush, and he probably mistook it for a rock. Now, it's long neck lifts high to regard him. It's as big as a Bull Terrier.

If Will had a tool, he could kill it and secure a good amount of meat. He dismisses the idea quickly. He's not worried about starving to death, since that will take a long time, and he's far more likely to die of dehydration first. He can figure out how to fish here, and gather nuts and hopefully fruit. The tortoise is staring at him with too much intellect, and he doesn't want to kill it.

Belatedly, he realizes he's standing with his pants in his hand staring at a giant tortoise.

"What are you staring at?" Will mutters, his voice rough.

He spots a jagged rock to his right, and when he moves the tortoise cranes it's neck to watch him. But soon it ignores him and starts investigating the nearby bush. Will sits and stretches the trouser fabric over a large rock, then starts hacking at it. After a few minutes the fabric tears and he works at it with his fingers, catching the grain.

It takes a bit more time to tear off a few inches from each leg; but it's not like he has anywhere to be, and it's satisfying to be at a task. Will folds up the leaves and puts them on the bottom of his foot, then ties the fabric around. The result is—well—it's marginally better than going barefoot. "Wish me luck," he says to the tortoise, and moves on. Will has to adjust

his “shoes” frequently as he goes, but he’s grateful for them when he keeps stepping on burrs. He can make something better with time.

He doesn’t see a sign of anyone.

The rain comes and goes throughout the day in light showers. Will’s head feels clearer than yesterday, though the headache persists. Water is helping. He drinks a bit at a time. He has intermittent cramps in his abdomen, and halfway through the day he has painful diarrhea. He washes himself in the ocean, feeling worn but determined to continue.

The cliffs smooth out to beaches; the rain moves on; the sun tips towards the horizon. His head is killing him. He drinks all the water from his jug and it makes a round sound when it hits his legs with every step. His shoes fully fall apart, and he ties the strips of cloth to his belt loop to keep them safe. He rests. Night falls. He moves on.

He’s on a stretch of beach in the dark when he smells smoke.

It takes him by surprise. He stops, and refocuses his eyes, piercing the dark sameness of the beach before him. There’s no fire, but there is a distant shape on the sand.

Will’s eyes sting and his throat closes up. It’s a sudden wave of emotion that’s startling in its intensity. He’s not alone. It has to be Hannibal.

And—it has to be Hannibal.

The feeling retreats as suddenly as it came, and Will realizes that he has a rare choice. He doesn’t have to go to Hannibal. If he does, he will never be able to leave him. Hannibal has always been an inevitable current in his life. But Will could turn around and walk into the ocean, and Hannibal would sit on this beach waiting for him and never know. Hannibal would wait. And Will would finally get the last laugh.

It was awful, wondering if Hannibal was dead while he was still alive. It was wrong. Will knows Hannibal feels the same.

He’s upwind of Hannibal. He can leave.

Will whimpers at the cruel desire.

He walks slowly on the sand, aching and torn feet bare. The round shape ahead of him resolves into someone sitting on the beach staring at the water. It’s him.

Hannibal looks over at him. The wind hasn’t shifted; he’s too far away to hear. Hannibal just knows.

Will’s legs go weak. His aches suddenly feel years old. He can’t take another step. Hannibal rises from the glass dark sand and moves towards him, a predator going in for the kill. Will can’t breathe. His lungs are too full.

Hannibal is close enough that his eyes catch the moonlight. Will tries to walk towards him, but his thigh cramps and his knees hit the sand. Hannibal hurries to close their distance and

his hands are on Will and Will is shuddering. They're back on the cliff; they're about to fall.

"Will." Hannibal sounds like he's trying to call Will back from a distance. Hannibal's here. He's here. They're both here.

Will sucks in a breath and clings to Hannibal. "Dizzy," he mutters, then: "I looked for you."

"You found me." Hannibal lets Will lean against him and recover. His hand goes up the back of Will's neck, under his curls, and it's the most soothing thing Will can remember feeling. Will's trembling. Hannibal's warmth calls him closer and he wants to bury his face in his neck, but he doesn't, just grips his arms tightly. The spots in his vision break and fade.

"Are you hurt?" Hannibal asks.

Will hesitates. "Not since washing ashore. Might have a head injury."

"Lie down." Hannibal eases him onto his back on the sand, mouth a hard line as he feels Will's scalp for a bump. Will catches his hands and holds them to his chest, close.

"Don't," Will protests. "I'm fine, just… be here."

"I'm here." The moonlight on the water slivers over Hannibal's hip and shoulder as he looks down over Will. He lets Will cling to his hands, smoothing his thumb over Will's knuckles. He feels like water, falling out of shape. "I hoped you would come to me. How I hoped."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Hannibal reaches out a hand and touches Will's hair. He lets him. He's always let him

On the dark stretch of beach they hold each other with silent, bare touches. Will can't see everything in the moonlight, but Hannibal seems more gaunt than he remembered. Satisfied, at last, that Will is not going to pass out or bleed out on him, Hannibal contents himself with holding a hand over his clammy forehead. Will doesn't have a cliff to throw them off this time, and hide from how close they are.

Before that intimacy breaks or bends, they sit up in unison and Hannibal helps Will to his feet, steadying him during the head rush that follows. They walk away from the water in a direction of Hannibal's design, and Will notices that Hannibal is limping. He wears similar clothes to Will, though his pants are a light color and he still has shoes.

They walk to a nearby bushy tree and Will recognizes it as a sort of camp, though there's not much to it. There's a fire pit dug into the loamy earth beyond the overhang, a stack of large palm leaves, whole and cracked coconuts, a pile of damp kindling and a life jacket at the base of the tree. They both sit near it.

"Drink," Hannibal says, and carefully hands Will an opened coconut.

Will examines it. It's halved perfectly, as coconuts are want to do when cracked properly. The insides have been scraped of meat and are halfway filled with a liquid. It's water, but he only takes a small sip. "I've drank enough today," he says cautiously.

"There's a fresh source within walking distance," Hannibal says. "Please."

"You washed up on the good beach," Will grumbles, and drinks.

Hannibal smiles wryly. "I wouldn't say that either of us have been fortunate, as of late."

Will drinks his fill and hands it back to Hannibal, who finishes it off. "Do you have any idea where we are?" Will asks.

"I expect you would have a better idea of that."

Will grimaces, and looks out to the water, edged with silver. It looks hard and solid, and Will flinches at a ghost of a memory: hitting the surface and going black. "I don't remember anything after the Dragon," he says. "The ocean swallowed me up, and then I washed up on these shores."

When he looks at Hannibal, he finds his expression intrigued and guarded. “Into one water and out the other.”

“Trading bodies.” It’s all too easy to fall into their byzantine turns of language. Will frowns. “What happened?”

“You’re exhausted. We can talk in the morning.”

Will is, but he doesn’t want to let Hannibal get away with dismissing him. “We wrecked, didn’t we?”

“There was a storm,” Hannibal said after a moment. “It bested us.”

Will sailed across the Atlantic alone in a small boat. It must have been a terrible storm. Or something went wrong. He searches Hannibal’s eyes, but he won’t give anything away. “You sure I didn’t push us over again?”

Hannibal just gives him a smile.

They lay down and share the life vest as a pillow. The only way to be comfortable is on his back, though his shoulder smarts and everything else aches. Will huffs and puts a wrist over his eyes, shifting to get comfortable, Hannibal perfectly relaxed next to him. His mind is racing with everything he doesn’t know but sleep drags him down soon enough.

Will dreams that he’s searching on the beach again, but this time when he finds Hannibal and their hands fall on each other, Will pulls him down to the sand. The need rises in him, and he puts his hands on Hannibal’s throat and strangles him.

Hannibal lets him. In his dreams, he always lets him.

Will wakes with a jerk into bright sunlight, groaning at once and covering his eyes. It's late in the morning. The previous days Will was forced awake by the dawnlight, and the sudden light is jarring. He breathes deeply through the lingering tremors of his dream, then sits up.

It’s a beautiful day. Heavenly. The water is tranquil and clear, striated in colors from the coral reefs and depths. His jug is filled with water, so Hannibal must have already gone to his source and back. Will looks for him and finds him investigating the plants along the dunes: low, shrubby succulents and pale grasses. He walks with a stick to support his right leg, and almost as soon as Will spots him, Hannibal looks his way.

He is here: not a starved mirage. Hannibal is the magnetic north of Will’s life, always pulling, and now the scattered mites of Will’s experience coalesce. In his orbit, always.

Seeing another human in the daylight is a profound experience. In his few days of solitude, Will felt ripped into a new life, utterly stripped of tools to navigate this world. The gap in his

memory, and the surreal theater preceding Hannibal's escape make him feel far, far away from a Will Graham he recognizes.

Hannibal walks back to him, slow but barely limping. He looks weathered but still regal, his cream pants and white shirt wrinkled and glowing. Seeing Hannibal up close, in the light, Will is finally able to understand what has happened to himself. He feels, suddenly, all the aches and discomfort he has pushed aside. The skin on Hannibal's nose and cheeks is pink and dry, and Will feels his own skin tight and stinging. Hannibal has tanned more than Will has, and Will feels raw where his shirt moves across his neck. Hannibal has stubble as well, which Will has never seen.

Will touches his own jaw. His beard hasn't grown at all. If anything, it's thinner. He touches the new scar tissue on his cheek—

remembers the Dragon lifting him on high, blade digging into his upper jaw—

flinches, and curls his hand into a fist. Hannibal observes it all.

"Good morning, Will," Hannibal says, when he finishes walking back to their little camp. "How are you feeling?"

Will takes stock with a breath. "I still have a headache. I feel nauseous and ragged. Thinking is easier, though, and I slept some."

Hannibal lowers himself down carefully, putting his walking stick to the side. He also has a bunch of green leaves that Will recognizes now as aloe. Hannibal passes Will the jug who gives a nod in thanks. "How long have you had the headache?" Hannibal asks.

"Since I washed up."

Hannibal reaches out a hand and touches Will's hair. He lets him. He's always let him. Hannibal gently palpates his skull, and finds a sore spot on the back. Will hisses in pain as Hannibal's fingers press down. "You mentioned nausea," Hannibal says, "Any vomiting?"

Will thinks. "No."

"Dizziness?"

"Yes. And the amnesia."

"Follow my finger." Hannibal moves it back and forth in front of Will's eyes, and he does. "Good. You may have a concussion."

"Thought so."

"I'm going to prescribe you bed rest and lots of water." There's barely a smile on Hannibal's face, but Will breaks out into a grin.

"I'll have a word with our host about the facilities."

“Any other injuries?”

“Broken ribs, maybe.”

“Unbutton your shirt, please.”

Will does, or tries to. His hands are shaking, and he huffs an embarrassed smile as his fingers slip on the button.

“A sign of dehydration,” Hannibal says, and reaches out.

Their fingers skim, and Will hesitates, but let’s Hannibal help. Will shakes his head. “It’s not the dehydration. Not only. They get like this, sometimes.”

Hannibal’s eyes flick up to him, amber in the sunlight. “For how long?”

“Italy,” Will says sharply. The repeated trauma to his shoulders wasn’t kind to him, even after all the physical therapy Molly encouraged him to do.

Hannibal opens Will’s shirt. “I didn’t notice,” he says, sounding regretful.

“I keep my hands in my pockets, when it’s bad,” Will explains.

“Lest others see a sign of weakness.”

They both look at the mottled bruises on Will’s side, and Hannibal palpates them. It stings. “Take a deep breath,” Hannibal instructs, and when Will does he winces, a sharp pain lancing through his chest.

“Doesn’t appear to be floating,” Hannibal says. “But likely fractured. You have to refrain from exertion or twisting your body. Also try to breathe deeply, to decrease the risk of pneumonia.”

“It hurts to breathe deeply,” Will points out.

“We’re both familiar with pain.”

“Intimately,” Will agrees.

Hannibal examines the stab wound in Will’s right shoulder, just above the circular scar where Chiyoh’s bullet hit home. Will cranes his neck to see healed, new scar tissue.

Hannibal pulls Will’s shirt back in place, and hands Will the long aloe leaf. “You have some bad burns. This will help.”

Will takes the leaf and snaps it in half, revealing sappy flesh. He starts to apply it to the back of his neck, under his eyes, and the back of his legs and arms.

“So where are we?” Will asks as he applies the balm.

“Precisely? I’m not sure,” Hannibal answers. “We were headed towards Cuba, somewhere north of the Bahamas when the storm came.”

“I didn't think there were any uninhabited islands left.”

“It could be a nature reserve. Or there’s a settlement on the other side of the island.”

Will tries to recall nautical maps. Although he doesn’t remember time on a boat with Hannibal, it feels like the information in beneath the surface. There aren’t any mapped islands far from the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic besides Bermuda, and this is definitely not Bermuda. “Maybe on the other side of the island, we would be able to see inhabited land,” Will thinks aloud.

Hannibal nods. “Until we’re both better, I wouldn't advise trekking further. It will be harder to secure food and water.”

“There could be people or an outpost just a couple miles away.”

“Perhaps. If people frequent this island, it’s as likely that they will stumble upon us.”

“So… what’s the plan?”

“Find more food, and build a shelter.”

Will looks out at the water. “This is surreal.”

Hannibal joins him in contemplating the great mass of their rebirth, glimmering in the sunlight. “Odysseus drifted for nine days in the open sea before the nymph Kalypso rescued him and brought him to the island Ogygia,” Hannibal said. “For love, she offered him the gift of immortality, but Odysseus refused.”

Will thought of scoffing. “Odysseus was a family man, through and through,” he said bitterly.

“More or less,” Hannibal agrees. “But he had upset the gods, and they kept him from returning home.”

Will hadn’t thought of Molly and Walter Jr. since he washed ashore. There had been no room in his mind. Now, though, he thinks of placing mirror shards on their eyes. Resisting the flinch that image inspires, Will diverts. “When he gets off the isle, Poseidon attempts to shipwreck him. I wouldn’t say this was an attempt.”

“What do the gods aim to keep us from?”

“It’s not a punishment,” Will said. “It’s mercy for everyone else.”

Will doesn't join Hannibal in bed, of course, even for the brief intervals of sleep he snatches while guiding the ship to their destination. The scent of him on the pillow fades after a few days.

When Hannibal is well enough to get up, he finds Will in the galley, slowly chopping an onion. Will has been cooking for the both of them, and although Hannibal's diet is limited to liquid, Will does a fine job. Hannibal wonders if Will practiced with his little family.

Hannibal sits at a booth on the edge of the room, and watches. Will's technique is perfect, albeit slow as though he doesn't want to mess up, or is deep in his thoughts. All he affords Hannibal is a glance and a nod as he comes in.

Will is still clean shaven. Although Hannibal appreciates the sight, the implications leave a sour taste in his mouth.

"You've healed well," Hannibal comments, looking at the exposed scar on Will's cheek.

Will's lip pulls on the other side of his face. "Compliments to the doctor."

Will maneuvers the chopped onions to the side of the cutting board, and begins on the potatoes. "Did I stitch it, or did you?" Hannibal asks.

"Doesn't matter, does it?" Will mutters, killing that line of conversation.

So Hannibal takes another route. "Did you cook much for Mrs. Foster and her son?" he asks.

Will looks in Hannibal's direction, subtle and scathing, and the knife comes down with a firm click. "I'm still married." His attention goes back to his task. "She took my last name, Wally got the hyphen."

"I thought Will Graham was dead?" Hannibal counters.

Will thinks on that—sees the direction Hannibal is weaving. "I cooked for them," Will says, mournfully, whispered, "Sometimes."

"I'm reaping the benefits of your experience."

"We ate a lot of fish," Will says.

"She knew that your palate had changed."

Will smiles slowly at that. He lights the burner under the pot and adds cooking oil. "Everyone knows what you were feeding us," Will says, eyes bright and swiveling to Hannibal. "It was the tour de force of your crimes."

Hannibal takes that as a compliment with a smile. It catches Will's like light in a mirror, growing in the room. "Providing and nurturing our family is an instinctual bonding experience. From the suckle of a babe to the wedding feast."

Hannibal sees the words perched in Will's jaw. He can hear them in their mind palace, slow and satisfying as pulling teeth: ‘ We bonded in more than blood *.’*

Will swallows the words down. The graceful veil slicks over him again, and the onions and potatoes go into the pot with a hiss. "The best way to the heart is through the belly," he says smoothly. "Or under the rib cage. I found cooking to be an easy way into the role."

"You enjoyed it."

"Too much," Will admits. "I can't cook without thinking of you."

Hannibal's heart sings, briefly. Will turns a wooden spoon in the pot, exact and with a familiar proficiency. "I learned a surprising amount from you through osmosis," Will adds.

Hannibal feels the words like a slap. He was never able to predict Will, but this is not quite Will. He is walled up in Hannibal's fortress, wearing his facade. It's not the words so much as the manner, which is removed and observant.

‘ Not so surprising *,’ Will says in Hannibal's mind. ‘* I thought you wanted to make me into a version of you? *’*

"Not so surprising," Hannibal voices aloud. "You're a quick learner."

"We're both adaptable," Will says. "It's just a matter of what we are adapting to."

Chapter 6

Will tries to eat, at Hannibal's behest. He is only somewhat successful. Besides the coconut meat, Hannibal has a few handfuls of tree nuts, and Will nibbles at them as best he can. He's not hungry, and his stomach feels the size and consistency of a throwing stone.

It's hard to lay back and do nothing while Hannibal limps away to gather supplies for their shelter, but his concussion demands rest. If he continues to push himself, Hannibal argues, it will only worsen. Seeing Hannibal slip between the leaves into the dense green tugs a fundamental chord in Will's gut; he doesn't like having him out of his sight.

But he closes his eyes in the shade of the trees and waits.

"You don't look very relaxed," Hannibal says, bemused, when he limps back with an armful of bamboo.

"We're shipwrecked on a desert island," Will complains where he lays, glancing up at Hannibal. He looks cheery.

"You're on a beautiful beach," Hannibal says, setting down the bamboo, "With tranquil, clear waters. You could afford to look on the bright side."

Will sits up slowly and rubs the back of his neck. One of the shoots of bamboo is cracked, and he takes it into his lap and pulls the seam. "Can we half some of these?"

"You have a build plan for us?"

"One's forming." Will puzzles over the construction in his mind. Bamboo is strong and versatile; they're lucky to have found it here.

"What else do you need?" Hannibal asks.

Will draws a Y in the sand with his finger. "Six branches shaped like this. Two about the same length as the bamboo, maybe five feet. The other four should be half that. Is there more bamboo?"

"More than I can carry," Hannibal says.

"Perfect."

It takes several hours for Hannibal to gather the remaining supplies. They walk to the inland stream, their pace feeble. Will notices, now, how Hannibal is far thinner than he was on the cliff, revealed when the way fabric occasionally clings to his thighs and ribs.

"How bad was it?" Will asks. Hannibal regards him, and Will glances down to where he knows the gunshot wound is.

"It was a close call," Hannibal answers. "But the worst is far behind. Come, it's just ahead."

Will notes the change in conversation and leaves it for the time be. The stream is clear and brisk and they drink their fill, using the halved coconuts as their vessels. Hannibal is neat, but Will lets the water stream down his chin.

When he's sated he leans back against the bank. "You don't want me to know what happened between the cliff and now." It's not a question.

"It's more interesting that way," Hannibal says, unapologetic.

"By the looks of you, it was, what? Three, four weeks."

Hannibal blinks at him.

"You know something about us that I don't," Will says. "I guess you've always preferred it that way."

Hannibal frowns, but isn't goaded. "I believe there is a reason you don't remember what happened after we fell."

"Or there's something you want to cover up."

Hannibal's gaze doesn't waver. "You've been reborn twice from the ocean. I'm merely curious to learn who this Will is."

Now it's Will's turn to frown. He is himself, that he's sure of. "I thought the time of secrets between us was over."

Hannibal's eyes soften, at that, grow almost longing. "Ask me anything of my time before the fall, and I'll answer you."

Will shakes his head, giving up with a huff. "You're like a dog with a bone."

When they walk back, Will starts searching for the right place to set up their shelter. "We'll want the protection of the trees without the bugs of the deep jungle," he explains as they venture into the shady area of trees at the edge of the beach. There are some of the gnarled, many limbed bushy trees here, which grow lower, and then there are taller, thicker pine trees which make a canopy of vibrant green. The ground is loamy and more stable than the beach.

Will decides on a spot between two tall pine trees and marks it with a bamboo pole. Together they bring over the supplies.

Hannibal seems content to let Will lead this project. Under his direction, they dig the tall, Y-shaped branches into the earth. Between them they hang a long bamboo pole, the topmost beam of their shelter. Lower and to the left and right they suspend two other poles, sketching the shape of a triangular prism.

"What I wouldn't give for a knife," Will says, resting against the tree. "Or a machete." He's trying to fray the ends of one of the ropes with a rock.

Hannibal has found a spade-shaped rock and is using it to split the bamboo branches in two. When they are halfed, they lean them against the higher and lower beams on both sides, building out the tent walls. If Will could hack off the burned end of the rope, he would have something to tie the bamboo down securely.

“We’ll carve tools,” Hannibal says.

“Out of bamboo?”

“The edge is naturally sharp, but it won’t last long. It will cut through flesh.”

Will finds a scrap of bamboo broken off from the poles. He tests the edge with his thumb, finding it splintered but, yes, sharp. He tries that on the fibers and when he pulls them taut, the bamboo is as useful as the stone, and certainly easier to handle. A while later, and he can start pulling the fibers of the rope apart.

By the time the sun is setting, they have tied down all the halves of bamboo, but there’s not enough to protect them from the rain. It looks more like a skeleton of a tent. Will wipes the sweat from his brow and tries not to be disappointed with the amount they were able to get done. “We can fill it out with palm leaves, and scavenge some more bamboo tomorrow.”

Hannibal nods. “Are you hungry?”

Will shrugs. It’s a little hard to focus, and his headache is back in full. “Not really.” He can tell that concerns Hannibal. “I’ll try to eat, though,” Will ammends.

Hannibal goes to the beach and Will waits by their shelter. To have something to do, he takes some scraps of bamboo and tries to break them to get the sharp outer edge. Then he softens part of it to be a handle, so it doesn’t cut both ways.

Blades that cut both ways are apt, for them.

Will doesn’t know what it means that he feels so comfortable around Hannibal and dependent on his presence. Even now, he wonders if Hannibal will not return to him, just a hallucination after all. Will was always more comfortable than he should have been around Hannibal, even after he knew what he was.

Hannibal returns with two coconuts, also cradling a short piece of bamboo which he hands to Will. Inside are sea snails and an orange urchin.

“Did you find these in the tides?” Will asks.

Hannibal nods. “There’s plenty of food around, if one knows where to look.”

“I’ll start fishing when I have the materials,” Will said. “I know I can make a fish trap with what we have around us. And I’ll go to the stream tomorrow to find stones for blades. Let’s keep our eye out for any bones, too.”

“In that case, it may be worth it to make traps for the land as well.”

“That’s true.”

Will watches as Hannibal uses a stone to crack off the outer shell of a coconut. Instead of opening it further, he collects the outer and inner hair. “Can you collect some tinder?” Hannibal asks.

Will walks around their grove, picking up what dry pieces he can. When he returns, Hannibal is working on starting a friction fire with the bamboo, scraping the bamboo tube up and down another stick vigorously. Will squats across from him and makes a small pile of tinder on the sand. He sees Hannibal take the bamboo tube and blow on the end, where the bamboo hair is catching the heat of the friction inside. A few minutes later and the hair catches light, and Hannibal nurtures it with his breath.

They tend the fire in silence. When it’s stable, Hannibal starts cooking.

Will shouldn’t be surprised that Hannibal can cook in any circumstance. With the same self assurance that he had on his own kitchen, Hannibal stuffs another piece of bamboo with the snails, urchin, and coconut meat. “If the bamboo stays wet, it won’t burn,” Hannibal explains, sticking the stuffed bamboo in the fire.

“How did you learn this?” Will asks.

“My Aunt Murasaki taught me many things.”

“Survival skills?”

“Traditional and ancient methods of cooking.”

“I was never officially a boy scout, but my dad taught me all sorts of foraging and survival skills. We learned to make due with what we had.”

“This is a true test of our skill and conviction,” Hannibal said. “What can we make out of nothing?”

“Are you really not worried?”

Hannibal turns the bamboo with a bare hand, fingers skirting the flames. “If we can secure steady food sources in the next few weeks, we will be fine. If not, we might slowly starve or succumb to nutritional deficiencies.”

“Practical,” Will says morbidly. Hannibal takes their food from the fire and lays it on a leaf. When it’s cooled for a minute, they spear pieces with splinters of bamboo.

The hot flesh is delicious and rich, almost too much for Will. He groans at the taste in appreciation and feels nourished and warmed at the core when he swallows.

Hannibal smiles across the flames.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is still watching him when he comes up for air and makes his way back to the beach. Will can never tell if Hannibal watches for fear that Will won't come up or simply a need to know his whereabouts when he emerges—maybe it's just lack of anything else interesting to watch. Hannibal prefers to bathe in the stream, so as not to have salt stick to his skin, and does so privately. Though he doesn't join him in the waves, he's shameless as he watches Will emerge, bare fabric clinging, wet and lean. It makes Will wonder. He wonders if he has to wonder.

The fire burns through the dark. Hannibal goes to bed first, crawling into their half-made tent and curling up on his side. Whether he slept or not until Will comes to bed, Will isn't sure, but when he finally buries the fire and lays down beside Hannibal, his eyes flicker open. Will feels Hannibal's gaze more than sees it, having stared into the light of the fire for so long, and quiet minutes pass as Will's eyes adjust to the dark. Hannibal's face emerges from the shadows, eyes black and barely glinting with the dying embers.

They lie close. There's only so much room in the shelter. Enough for them to lay on their back side by side, though they are curled towards each other now.

"Bedelia said you were in love with me," Will whispers in the dark.

"Is that what you wish to ask me?" Hannibal asks, eyes searching.

"I don't have to ask," Will said.

Hannibal's gaze lowered over Will's face like a sigh, and Will's hands itched, to hold or tear he didn't know. "Do you ever think of everything that you've done to me?" he whispered, scars aching.

"Do you?" Hannibal returned.

It is easy to spend time with Hannibal, here. Their days are filled to the brim with the work of survival: getting clean water; gathering nuts, fruit, and other food; finding firewood; cutting bamboo; healing. It's hard work, and exhausting. They start to wake with the sun and sleep early once dark has settled.

By the end of the second day their shelter is secured with more bamboo, and layered with palm leaves to keep out the damp. Rain comes that afternoon and tests their work, and they make adjustments when it passes. Will's proud of what they have built, and if Hannibal's little smile is any indication, so is he.

With experimentation, Will finds the right kind of rocks by the stream to break into blades. While Hannibal forages, he cracks the stone into chips with a hammer stone. The larger the rock, the bigger the blade-chips will be, and by the end of the day Will has plenty of small blades and a few larger ones, the size of his palm. He carves a handle out of the bamboo and uses rope to secure his knife.

Once Will has a knife, everything is much easier. He can cut the rope into manageable pieces of thread, carve bamboo to create secure notches for their tent. He doesn't waste the blade on cracking their coconuts, which he is already sick of eating. But it does come in handy while he works on weaving the fish trap out of bamboo.

He teaches Hannibal knots and the general premise of the fish trap, and Hannibal works on his own. They sit side by side on the beach's edge, weaving in companionable silence.

Will's burns heal somewhat with the aloe. Hannibal helps him apply it where Will can't reach, and when Will can't stand the stickiness any longer he strips off his clothes and jumps in the ocean.

He feels Hannibal's eyes on him, heavy with an unspeakable hunger.

Will floats on his back in the ocean, letting the waves take him up and down. He lets the fear grip him, and lets it go; lets the ocean be calm and clear, perfect turquoise, and not a beast sent to rend him in two. The sky buoys all around him.

Will scrubs his boxers clean and spends as much leisure time as he can swimming above the reefs. It builds his strength, and he relearns how to see underwater, blowing air bubbles and catching them in his eyelashes. He practices swimming down to the reef to pursue the fish, already thinking of how he'll make a spear. There are uncountable species around the reef, it's just a matter of finding the ones slow or blind enough for him to catch.

Will spends longer and longer under the water. His chest hurts where his ribs are broken, but if he's going to catch fish this way he'll need to be able to hold his breath much longer.

Hannibal is still watching him when he comes up for air and makes his way back to the beach. Will can never tell if Hannibal watches for fear that Will won't come up or simply a need to know his whereabouts when he emerges—maybe it's just lack of anything else interesting to watch. Hannibal prefers to bathe in the stream, so as not to have salt stick to his skin, and does so privately. Though he doesn't join him in the waves, he's shameless as he watches Will emerge, bare fabric clinging, wet and lean. It makes Will wonder. He wonders if he has to wonder.

Truthfully, he is more aware of Hannibal's body than he ever has been before. It's survival oriented—Will thinks daily about how much food they have, and if they need more water, or

if they have gotten too much sun. Hannibal's weight concerns him, having already been thin from his injury. Will is underweight himself. There are new gaps between his fingers.

It's this awareness of Hannibal's body that leads to the realization that Hannibal is concealing his body from Will. Privacy is scarce in their current living quarters but they both give what they can. For hygiene's sake they dug a hole a short ways off for their excrement, and give a wide berth; it's tough to stay clean and it feels necessarily to cling to what civility they can.

But Hannibal is never even shirtless around Will. This may just be to protect his skin from the sun, maybe. With how Hannibal stares at Will's scars when he goes swimming, the lack of reciprocity seems conspicuous.

So Will tests it. Next time they go to the freshwater stream in the morning, Will stays while Hannibal washes his clothes and himself. Hannibal gives him a curious look, then undoes the buttons of his shirt.

"After I check the fish traps, I'm going to try with the spear," Will says, to fill the silence.

"Have you ever fished in that manner before?" Hannibal asks, making conversation.

Will shakes his head, watching as Hannibal pulls his shirt off. He can see every one of his ribs. If they don't start catching fish, they're going to be in trouble. "I haven't except to kill larger fish we netted, but I know the general idea."

Hannibal removes his trousers as well, then kneels by the stream. His skin stretches over his back as he dunks his clothes in the clear water, and Will feels a stab of shock.

" *Hannibal* ."

Will steps closer. There is a large, ugly circle of scar tissue on Hannibal's back, pink and twisted. It looks like a large brand.

"What *happened?"*

Will's hand hovers over it. Hannibal glanced over his shoulder. "Mason wanted to give me the pig's experience," he explained lightly. "It's quite ugly, isn't it?"

Will kneels behind him to take a closer look. He clenches his fists as a wave of anger washes over him; relaxes his fingers; reaches; touches. On the sliver of Hannibal's face he can see, his eyes flutter shut as Will traces the scar. "I didn't know," Will says harshly.

"You never asked." Hannibal's hands are still, holding his clothes in the water, allowing Will to touch him.

Will presses the flat of his hand to the scar, covering most of it. His skin feels hot to the touch. Will is furious. "I wish I could kill them," Will whispers.

Hannibal's next breath is hard. His shoulders straighten, and he smiles down at the water. Will skims his fingers down Hannibal's spine, then stands.

“What did they do to you?” Will asks, watching the water and letting his anger settle at the sight. He sits beside him on the bank, and Hannibal resumes washing his clothes.

“Under Mason’s instructions, Cordell branded me and hogtied me naked in a pig pen,” Hannibal says, without a trace of bitterness. “I imagine you remember the rest of the plan.”

“As clear as day.” Will rubs his brow. “Jesus, Hannibal.”

“You don’t like the notion of someone else marking me.”

“No,” Will says, uneasily.

“You seemed content to watch the Dragon defile me.”

“Mason was never strong enough to fight fair.”

Hannibal scrubs the cloth and gives an amused, small smile. “So, the Dragon deserved the marks he left on us.”

Will thinks about that for a moment. “Do you think I would have stood back and let the Dragon take you?”

Hannibal takes his shirt from the water and wrings it out several times, water sluicing over his knuckles. “It was a possibility, was it not?”

Will had gone into that night not knowing what would happen, but it now all seems clear. “I don’t think it could have gone any other way.” He smiles, and Hannibal returns it.

Will’s first attempts with the spear are unsuccessful. He spends over an hour diving in the reef, chasing fish and throwing and stabbing the spear as hard as he can—but the fish dart out of his way, and he comes back to the shore exhausted and empty handed.

The fish traps that he’s tucked into the reef are empty as well. The traps are made of two woven cones, one smaller and inside the other. Fish can swim in one way, but it’s too narrow for them to swim out. Will adds to the bait, hoping something will attract the fish.

Hannibal is starting the fire when Will gets back, sighing in frustration. “Nothing,” he says tightly, pulling his pants from where they hang on a branch and stuffing his legs inside. “And the traps are still empty.”

“There’s always tomorrow,” Hannibal says, then bends and stokes the fire with his breath.

“And if I can’t catch anything tomorrow?”

Hannibal ignores Will’s pessimism. “You’re a good fisherman.”

“When I have my tools,” Will says. But Hannibal is right. He is a good fisherman, he just needs to learn these waters and his prey wants.

Will lays back with a groan as Hannibal cooks their dinner, more snails and urchins and coconut. His shoulder hurts something fierce, and he rubs at the knotted muscle. After they eat, Hannibal puts his hand on Will’s shoulder. “Let me help,” he says.

Will dismisses the offer at once, shaking his head and rolling his shoulder. “It’s not so bad, I’m fine.”

He hears Hannibal sigh behind him, and sit closer than is proper. “How will you catch our food tomorrow if your back is in knots?” He brushes his thumb lightly along Will’s shoulder, near the base of his neck.

“This is all… mutual self interest?” Will scoffs, but he doesn’t move away as Hannibal’s thumb finds the swell by his shoulder blade, putting just enough pressure for Will to want to hiss.

Hannibal tuts when he finds the knot, then removes his touch. Will can feel the absence of it. “Do you object?” Hannibal asks.

“I suppose not,” Will grumbles.

Hannibal settles behind him. Will gives a big sigh and puts his fists against his calves, shoulders up by his ears until his exhales. Hannibal’s hands map the slope of his neck and breadth of his shoulders, fingers tracing the muscles around the blades. The touch feels electrified—Will is so, so aware of how those hands could hurt him. It makes it hard to relax.

Hannibal braces one hand on the middle of Will’s back and begins to squeeze the muscles by his shoulder in great handfuls, working up to the top of his shoulders and neck, and Will stuffs the groan back down his throat. “It will help if you breathe deeply,” Hannibal says, working circles into the knotted muscle.

“Right.” Will unclenches his teeth and breathes. He can feel the toxins and tightness squeezed from his muscles. Hannibal’s knuckles feel like heaven and hell when they dig in to the swollen mass. He knows what he’s doing, certainly, his knowledge of anatomy coupled with care and graceful strength, and soon Will’s breath is heavy with praise he can’t keep inside, wincing and groaning softly.

“Ah, yes,” Hannibal says, finding another knot by Will’s neck. His fingers wrap around the back and squeeze, pinching up the spine and then digging into the culprit.

“Guess I’ve been tense,” Will says with a breathy laugh.

“We are sleeping on the ground.”

“Yeah. How are you feeling?”

“A bit sore. I’ve been stretching which helps.”

“I suppose I should do that. God, that feels good.”

Hannibal grips his bicep with one hand and manipulates it in a circle, pressing beneath Will’s shoulder blade as he does. Will groans fully and bites his lip. It feels *vulnerable* for Hannibal to manipulate his body like this, to find the places that hurt and force them back where they should be. Like he’s molding him. Will shudders as Hannibal forces his shoulder into submission, and then soothes the heated muscles with wide, slow swipes of his hand.

“Massage in conjunction with physical therapy will help your recovery,” Hannibal says, not sounding clinical. “You may be able to improve your mobility and lessen the shakes.”

“Good thing I’m stuck on an island with my own massage therapist.”

Hannibal slides his hand to the back of Will’s neck and he hangs his head, stretching. With the press of Hannibal’s fingers, Will stretches his head to one side and the other. Nails scrape against the bottom of his curls, up his scalp and down to the shell of Will’s ear. Everywhere Hannibal touches him feels warm. He doesn’t want Hannibal to stop, and Hannibal doesn’t seem to want to either, but then…

Will has a prodigious imagination. He knows where this goes, where this has always gone, whether it’s a knife or a kiss. When they touch, they change each other—they destroy.

“Thank you,” Will says, and takes Hannibal’s hand from his neck. He turns and sees Hannibal attentive and wanting, their fingers curling together.

“Will I need to insist, next time?”

Will swallows. The answer feels too complicated. “I don’t know,” he answers truthfully.

Hannibal looks down at the scar on his shoulder, then back. Will can see the different colors in his growing beard: white and grey and brown. He can see the cracks in dry skin around his lips.

“Sometimes I can’t be touched,” Will offers as explanation, his throat tight. “When I was with Molly, there were these times when the thought of being touched, even gently, was like being flayed.” Even speaking of it makes him feel like blades are pressed all over his skin. He shivers, clenching Hannibal’s hand, and lets it go.

“Trauma can make us more aware of sensations, and our susceptibility to them,” Hannibal says. He sets the back of his knuckles to Will’s cheek, stroking down the scar. Will flinches, but doesn’t pull away; closes his eyes and feels the touch begin and end.

“I would always tell Molly ‘it’s not you’,” Will said with a bitter smile, opening his eyes. “But—it is you.” The reason behind everything.

“My fault. My burden.” Hannibal says it like he’s happy to bare it. “I was not touched for three years, except indirectly or violently.”

“And now, it’s just the two of us.”

“Perhaps for the rest of our lives.”

Will laughs and shakes his head, staring at the fire. He shifts and adds some kindling. Hannibal being deprived for years saddens him, somewhat. He was responsible. If they weren’t so alone, he wouldn't like the idea of other people touching Hannibal. It’s like a part of them has melded together and Hannibal’s body feels like his own, sometimes wanting, sometimes rejecting. “I’ve went through most of my life without touch. You know that.”

“And now?”

Will blinks as the embers curl into wisps. “I expect both pain and a twisted comfort from you,” he says lowly. “Though always unique, yours is a familiar lash.”

“I feel similarly.”

“I never—” Will takes a sharp breath, and he gets that feeling of danger all over his skin. He wonders if it’s safe to let the hurt out now. “I never hurt you, the way you hurt me.”

Hannibal weighs that. He shifts to a more comfortable seat, adjacent to Will, and joins him in staring at the flames. “If we count proxies, you’ve wounded me.”

“I don’t want to tally points,” Will spat. “And I would win anyway.”

“Are you looking for assurance that I won’t hurt you?”

Will snorts. “No. I just…” He rubs over his arms and shoulders, shakes his head, and stands up. He grabs his shirt from where it hands and pulls it on as he stalks out to the beach.

It’s deep sunset, and the sky is split into pinks and purples, clouds tearing shadows across the sky. Will walks right to the edge of the water and lets the waves wash over his feet. Maybe it would be good to walk, along the coast until it gets dark. He can follow the water back.

Hannibal doesn’t let him, though, and Will hears the crunch of his footsteps in the sand, pausing a bit away, and then coming nearer. Will glances and sees that Hannibal has taken off his shoes where the tide won’t reach, and is walking barefoot the rest of the way. It’s unfair that he kept his shoes through their wreck, Will thinks to himself, and then imagines wrestling Hannibal down into the water and holding his head under the waves. He wouldn’t kill him, just make him uncomfortable, wet and cold as night approached. And then—his mind sputters out like the end of a movie reel. Flashes of images.

Hannibal is watching him curiously. He wants to push Will through his avoidance.

Will wants to drown him. To wound him with words.

“You don’t know what it’s like to live with the echoes of your fingerprints all over me,” Will says in a scathing, hurt voice. “That can never be simple between us. You can’t turn back the clock if my body still remembers.”

“Have I overstepped?”

Will runs a hand through his hair. If anything, Hannibal has been hands off since they were reunited. Will feels hot and cold everywhere Hannibal massaged him. “You have before. I don’t think it was a good idea, I feel like I’m crawling in my skin now. Maybe we should just.” Will gestures between them. “Not.”

He feels Hannibal’s crashing disappointment as he feels his own sense of security. This is right, he thinks, and he won’t have to think about wrestling Hannibal to the sand and doing something stupid if they just never touch.

“So you don’t wish us to have any physical contact.” Hannibal’s face is stony, his voice slightly choked. “At this stage in our recovery I suppose it’s possible.”

Will’s chest flutters, and sinks. He thinks of how they held each other before the fall. “I don’t know how to touch you, Hannibal, I don’t know how to feel okay with it.”

Hannibal steps closer, and Will steps back, feeling like the surf is dragging him in. “I won’t force you to do anything.” But Will feels the pull between them as Hannibal steps into his personal space. “I won’t touch you, Will, if that’s what you want.”

Yet Will can feel his gaze, scorching his face and neck. His words are cruel: now, he'll give Will the space he asks for? But didn't he before; didn't he wait for Will? Will tenses and grounds his feet. He would barely have to lift his hand to reach Hannibal, close as he is. “You forced plenty before,” Will grits.

“And you allowed plenty.”

“What’s changed? How am I supposed to trust that you won’t bite out my throat?”

Hannibal’s look is severe and predatory. His gaze rakes down Will’s neck, exposed by his open shirt. Will makes a cut-off noise in his throat as Hannibal reaches slowly, and yet Will doesn’t stop him, not when he strokes the tendon of his neck or pushes the collar down; not when Hannibal leans in and breathes against his skin. Will has to grip Hannibal’s arms to keep from falling over, and he doesn’t step back or push him away, he doesn’t want to, because his blood is boiling at how close they are, and it’s *right.*

“Do you think I want to end you know, after everything?” Hannibal’s voice spills dark and low over Will’s neck and he trembles. “I could do it. It would not be too difficult to split and rip your skin.”

“ *Hannibal* ,” Will gasps and he digs his fingers in. He feels the teeth against his neck. “You want to. I know what you want.”

The teeth are replaced by a soft brush of skin. “But what do you want, Will?”

God, he doesn't know. Hannibal’s teeth press into his neck, slowly building pressure, and Will shudders; arches into it or away, he isn’t sure, only that the sting is slow and wet and more, and god it *aches*, all the way down his shoulder and arm. “Oh god,” Will breathes as that pain punctures everything and bleeds it away. His legs sag but Hannibal holds him up by the

waist, sucking slow. There's nothing savage about the bite, but it is brutal in its insistence. Will feels weak and strong with it all at once.

Hannibal lets him go and licks over the bite once. "Should we starve ourselves now, Will?" he asks breathlessly.

Will can feel Hannibal's teeth like they're still in his flesh, his breath on his nape, and his solid yet teetering form in his arms. He looks down at their feet and feels like the ocean is drawing them back in, surprised by how aroused he is, dizzy with it. Will tilts his head to the slope of Hannibal's neck and opens his jaws in answer, and Hannibal sighs as Will bites down.

It shocks something in Will. Behind his eyes he sees the Dragon's wings unfolding and his vicious teeth; feels the night on the cliff pulse through him. Will adds more and more pressure, salivating and growling as Hannibal gives a hitching breath. Where Hannibal holds him gently, Will's grip is savage, bruising. Hannibal's taste floods his mouth and Will feels so damn alive that he never wants to stop.

"Will." Hannibal's voice is adoring.

Will finally lets go with a gasp, saliva dripping down his chin. Hannibal helps steady him, and Will plants his hands on his shoulders and holds them at a distance, breathing heavily. In the dusky light he can see the indentations of his teeth in Hannibal's flushed skin.

Chapter 8

Will doesn't wear his wedding band.

Hannibal notices this only when they sit down to dinner, a hearty soup, and bread for Will. Perhaps that's not accurate: Hannibal noticed its absence before, but only now has it come to the surface of his attention. Will rubs his thumb against its absence, a band of paler skin.

Will notices his noticing, and shores up his defenses, chin held high.

"Did you lose it in the water?" Hannibal asks conversationally. Of course he didn't.

"I took it off."

"When?"

"It didn't seem to belong to me, anymore."

"What did you do with it?"

Will's gaze is light and uncaring. "I didn't throw it into the ocean, if that's what you're asking. Why do you care?"

"It's a potent symbol of your marriage, and the life you lead for three years. I assumed you would care about it."

Will shrugs, but there's a tightness in his jaw. "That's over now."

"You could go back to them."

"I really couldn't."

Will is angry. Hannibal can feel it bristling in the air between them, see it in the white of Will's knuckles as he sips his wine. "What happened while I was unconscious, Will?"

"I told you. You nearly died."

"No: what happened to you?"

Will breathes hard through his nose. "Is it strange, not knowing pieces of yourself? Memory is liquid."

"Like time. We perceive the ripples as they cross the surface."

"I'm not interested in the past, Hannibal."

Hannibal closes his eyes, and imagines. It isn't hard to deduce. "You took off your ring for surgery. Slipped it into your pocket as you scrubbed up in the little bathroom, dodging your

reflection in the mirror. It slipped your mind, after the exhaustion of the surgery and your vigil."

Will stared at him.

"Maybe you remembered it when you stitched up your cheek, or washing the blood off in the shower. It wasn't a decision to remove the ring; but you decided to leave it off. Why?"

"I told you, it doesn't feel like mine."

"Sometimes the easiest way to deal with a painful past is to dive feet first into the future. But it always comes creeping back."

Will looked tired. "I didn't want that life to be tainted by this one. No help from you, there."

Will was referring to Francis attacking his family, though he didn't seem to be mad at Hannibal for that. Maybe that anger rested with that other Will Graham. "You're the same man who married your wife," Hannibal said, "Who played father for three years, and gutted the Dragon."

Will shook his head softly. "I'm changed," he said slowly. "I can feel it under my skin."

In the morning, the bite mark on Hannibal's neck is a livid purple. It's stark against his golden skin and the white-pepper of his beard, and every time Will glances at it—which is often—he feels like he's breaking the surface of the water. A slap of air and light. A great unfurling in his chest.

His neck isn't the only part of him that aches. Biting Hannibal was probably the single most erotic experience of his life, seconded only by the orlotans and slaying the Dragon. Will has to go off 'exploring' and work his cock for some relief. Unbidden images of Hannibal doing the same come to his mind: his worn, tan body languid in their tent, stroking himself slow to thoughts of Will. It takes no time at all for Will to come, pressing his free hand to his bruised neck. It feels so good his legs shake.

Will's not gay, and he hasn't thought of Hannibal like this before. Only… he has. Like so much of his knowledge of Hannibal and himself, this has remained under the surface, hidden but present. Eroticism is part of their dance; actual sex is not. What's actual sex in comparison to a knife in the gut?

Will goes straight to the ocean, knowing Hannibal will be able to smell it on him. He's not sure what feels more illicit: jacking off while thinking about Hannibal, or keeping it from him.

The water is beautiful. Will sees a turtle bobbing on the waves. For a crystal clear moment, Will is glad that they have wound up in this impossible place: there is no one else in this

world but them. No one to see them. They are free.

The rest of the day is difficult. There's a small fish in the trap, no larger than both of his palms. Will brings his meager catch back to their tent, Hannibal off foraging for fruit and nuts. Will resets the trap and tries again with the spear. He's getting better with it, but doesn't manage to catch anything before his shoulder is spasming in protest.

He's bypassed hunger and gone straight to bone-ache weariness. His ribs heave above the concave plane of his stomach, and Hannibal looks similarly thin, the bones of his face stark and skull-like. Their bodies are slowly eating themselves for lack of other nutrients. It's hot, too, somehow making everything heavier, and Will feels like he's sweating away all his muscles and fat.

In the late afternoon, when they return to the stream for more water, Hannibal has to sit down halfway there to catch his breath. The sight of his weakness hurts Will more than anything else he's endured on this island, and he sits next to Hannibal on the ground and rests his head on his shoulder.

"I'm alright," Hannibal assures him, voice distant. But Will doesn't like the glassy look in his eyes.

The fish is hot, mouthwatering, and gone in two bites. They both lick their fingers clean. The meal affords them a burst of meager energy, and afterwards Hannibal massages Will's shoulders again. It hurts in the best way, and Hannibal's touch sets of a swell of desire in Will's gut, though he doesn't have the energy for a proper erection, thank god.

"I'm going to set out some more traps tomorrow," Will says, breaking the silence as Hannibal does something wonderfully perverse to the muscles of his bicep. "On land," he clarifies. "Would be nice to have some real bait."

Hannibal hums thoughtfully. "What creatures have you seen?"

"Tortoises, opossums. I've heard something like smaller primates, but they must be in the thicker jungle. There must be rodents too."

"I've seen squirrels and smelled rats."

"And the bats, of course, though we won't catch those."

"Not much meat on them."

"I don't know how I feel about eating primates."

Hannibal's hands still on him. Will glances over his shoulder. "I'm kidding."

Hannibal huffs a laugh. His hand smoothes up to Will's neck, over the bite mark, and when he puts pressure on it all the breath leaves Will's lungs. "Very amusing, Will." His voice feels very close.

"Have you had monkey?"

“Yes. I’ve had a number of exotic animals”

Hannibal’s fingers are still over the bruise. They spread, trace. He can feel Hannibal looking at it. “Try everything once?” Will asked.

“If the opportunity presents itself.”

“Are all your tastes so… egalitarian?” Will asks before he can stop himself. The massage must have loosened more than his back. Maybe he just likes amusing Hannibal.

“Is there something you want to ask me in particular?”

Will does want to ask. Why does he keep talking himself into corners?

The silence stretches on. Fire echoes across the ground. Hannibal’s fingers move back down his arm, replaced by a dry, soft warmth. Hannibal’s lips. It can’t be called a kiss.

“Have you ever been with a man?” Will asks.

There’s a vibration against his neck, and then Hannibal pulls back. “Yes. On a number of occasions.”

Will’s a bit surprise that the world doesn’t collapse beneath him, speaking of this out loud. “Was it ever more than an alibi?”

“I’ve taken my pleasures.”

“I never have.”

“Taken your pleasure?”

Will moves a bit away, rubbing his neck. “No, I mean with a man.” He stands and stretches, puts a bit of distance between them as he feeds the fire. Hannibal’s eyes follow him.

“What makes it come to mind?” Hannibal asks, all innocence.

Will snorts. “You know, Chiyoh told me that there were other means of influence besides violence.”

“Oh?”

“Shocker, isn’t it? Well, then she kissed me and pushed me off a train.” Something twitches across Hannibal’s face at that. Will rubs the bite mark on his neck. “So she made her point.”

“Violence is a familiar language.”

“This… domesticity? Not so much.”

Hannibal looks down, troubled. “But you have used intimacy and domesticity to influence others.”

Molly. Will shudders, nails against his nape. And how did that turn out? “I guess I have. I’m not trying to manipulate you. What would be the point, out here?”

Hannibal nods. He’s letting Will dance around it, not pushing. It leaves Will unmoored. He’s throwing out lures, but Hannibal isn’t taking the bait.

Some fisherman he is these days.

Will stays up working on traps while Hannibal sleeps. There is a change in the air that Will has come to associate with tropical rain. Sure enough, half an hour later it’s pouring, which means he has to stop working. He puts out the fire and crawls into their shelter, laying back and listening to the rain fall.

He doesn’t quite sleep—he floats just beneath consciousness. His back aches, his belly gnaws.

He comes fully awake when Hannibal whimpers besides him. At first Will thinks it was in his head, but Hannibal does it again, a deeply pathetic voice in the back of his throat. Shocked, Will turns on his side and sees Hannibal’s brows drawn and jaw tight, twitching feebly as he tries to get away whatever nightmare plagues him.

Hannibal is having a nightmare.

Will is intimately familiar with nightmares, but he has never seen Hannibal afraid. He’s too fascinated to think to wake him, staring, enraptured. Then Hannibal sobs, and Will can’t stand it. He shakes Hannibal gently, then more urgently. “Hannibal.”

He jerks awake with a gasp and clutches Will’s arm, eyes wide. “You were having a nightmare,” Will tells him gently. “You’re awake now, it’s okay.”

Hannibal takes a deep breath, shaking like he’s cold. “Not a nightmare,” he says. “A memory.”

He doesn’t say anything more than that. His eyes are distant, his throat tight. Will lays next to him and pulls him close, tucking him under his chin, and Hannibal clings to him like a lifeline. Will shouldn’t want to comfort the man who has mutilated him, body and mind, but he does. They’re the only two people in the world, after all.

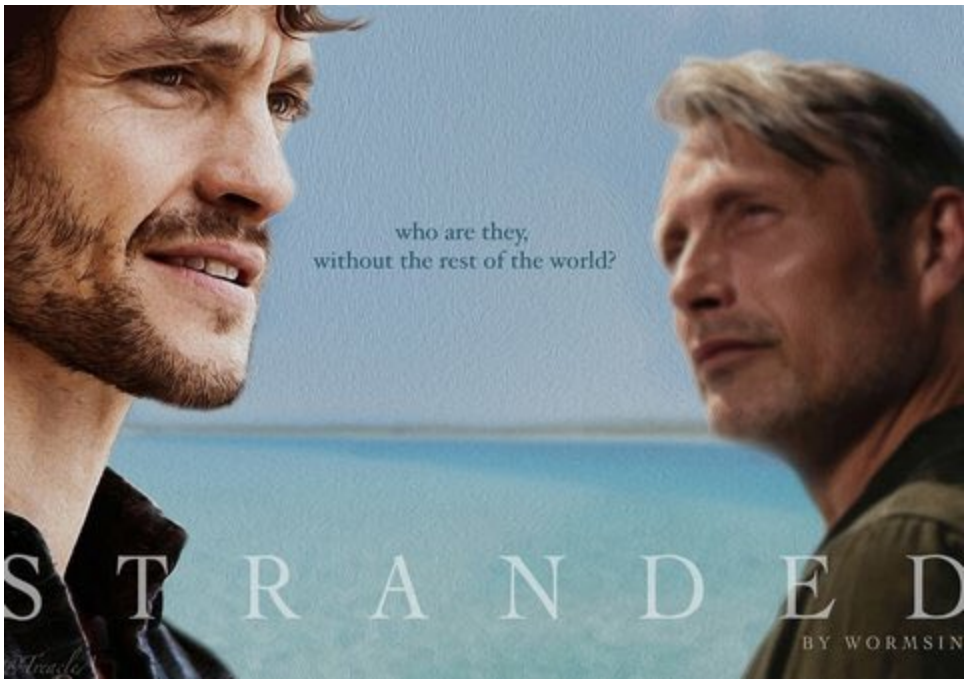
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

the chapter I've been waiting to write!

cw: choking

also check out this amazing manip TreacleA did!!!



Will wakes up hungry, and determined.

He hasn’t caught a fish after two days of trying. That’s unacceptable. At this rate, they’re going to starve to death.

He peels the husk off the last of their coconuts, to drink half before giving the rest to Hannibal. They’ve broken a bamboo pole and dug it into the ground, a makeshift edge, and by smacking the coconut against the point it’s easy to peel the husk. Will uses a sharpened stick to poke into one of the three holes, and drinks it down. The hair from the husk he stores by their firewood, for kindling.

His head is foggy, and he’s having trouble thinking. Maybe he should abandon the spear and make a fishing hook and line. They haven’t found any bones he could carve into a true hook, but he can carve a gorge hook out of wood, maybe go up their freshwater stream and find a

deeper stretch with more fish. But will he find success in time if he changes strategy? There's so much to eat, right there in the reefs, if only he can catch it.

Hannibal is still asleep in their shelter, when Will brings him the coconut water to drink. That's concerning. He's usually so quick to wake. He doesn't look peaceful, but as if he's submerged in a thick miasma—it makes Will's gut lurch. He kneels beside him and shakes his shoulder, watches his lashes flutter as he comes awake.

"Good morning, sunshine," Will says. He strokes the hair from his face, and Hannibal leans into the touch. "Sit up and drink."

Hannibal obliges, putting a hand to his gut wound. Will feels compelled to support him as he drinks. "I'm going to catch us something to eat," Will says, licking his dry lips. "I promise."

"I have the utmost faith in you," Hannibal says, his voice rasping but sincere. The bite mark on his neck is going yellow around the edges, creased in half as he turns his neck.

"I started working on some traps last night, but it rained before I could finish."

"I know how to make basic traps. I'll gather bait and set some while you fish."

"Okay. Don't go far." Will squeezes his shoulder and ducks out of the shelter. His vision spots with light as he straightens, and he feels his blood rush to his toes, but he doesn't stumble. The corpse of trees comes back into focus, and beyond the dark greenery is the golden white beach and teal streak of water. Will sheds his shirt and pants, draping them over a branch, picks up three of his spears, and sets off.

The sand is hot under his feet, the water cool. First he checks the fish trap, and is disappointed to find that something has bitten a hole through the side to get the bait. He brings it back to the shore; they'll have to repair it later. He swims for a while, scouting the terrain of the reef and watching the movement of his prey. Trunkfish, butterfly fish, little angelfish not worth his time, yellowtail snapper, and of course a whole host of brightly colored creatures on the reef that he has no idea if they can eat. There's lionfish too, big, lazy swimmers, and he sets his sight on them.

Their spines may be venomous, but the meat isn't poisonous. Will throws the spear a few times, but it just scatters the fish in the area. This spear isn't perfectly straight, and it wobbles along its trajectory. It gets stuck in the reef on a particularly disastrous throw, and Will fights with it to get it out.

He takes a break and goes back to shore, to carve down that bend in the spear, get a straight throw. He sits next to his tools on the sand—the other spears, fish trap, and a stone knife—and carves. It's soothing work, to carve off slivers of the shaft and eye the diminishing curves. If only the hunger pangs will leave him alone.

When Will is ready to go back into the water, he spots Hannibal headed towards the rocky stretch, to scavenge from the tide pools. They wave to each other.

Will feels like the warmth from the sand under his feet has crawled up to his chest.

He dives back beneath the waves, spear in hand. He's gotten better at holding his breath and keeping the bubbles in his eyelashes to see, and searches for his prey. Amongst the colorful coral and fishes, Will finds a big, slow lionfish. He tries to keep his shadow from falling on it, swimming at an angle. Follows it until it hits a reef and turns around. Pulls back—aims—throws.

Will hears the thunk, and the sand billows up as the fish thrashes. He's hit it, he knows, and he releases a bout of bubbles in joy and relief. He grapples the end of the spear and pushes it through the fish and onto the ocean floor, securing his catch; then kicks up to the surface.

Will takes a huge breath of air, and lifts the spearhead out of the water. The lionfish twitches at the end. Food. They can *eat* . Will lets out a breathy laugh and swims back to shallow water. "Hannibal!" he calls when he can stand, waves surging around his legs. He sees Hannibal perk up down the beach, and Will gestures with the spear, smiling bright. "Caught one!"

Hannibal makes his way over, limping slightly still, but much stronger than when Will first found him.

God, Will is relieved. Careful of the spines, he hooks his fingers into the fish's gills and drags it off the spear. He always tries to kill fish humanely, so he grabs a thin stone knife and jabs it into the fish's skull, twisting it side to side to scramble the brain. There's only a bit of blood, stark against the pebbled color of the fish.

Hannibal's shadow falls over him. Will looks up and grins, blinded by the blue of the sky. "We're going to eat well tonight."

It's more than that. They're not going to die. They can survive this.

Hannibal kneels down next to him and looks down at their salvation, smiling, glowing in the sunlight, and Will is so overcome with this simple happiness that he doesn't think, he just leans in and kisses Hannibal on the lips.

Will laughs brightly, shakes his head, and makes to stand. "We'll have to cook it sooner rather than later. I don't know if I can wait—"

He doesn't make it to his feet. Hannibal has grabbed his arm for some reason and has turned him back, face blank. *Oh. I kissed him* , Will realizes, and then Hannibal's mouth is on his.

Oh.

Oh.

Hannibal tastes like salt, and his lips and stubble are rough. That's a completely new sensation. The kiss is closed-mouth but there's pressure and heat behind it, and Hannibal cradles Will's jaw, and Will's holding onto his shoulders like all those times before—like the cliff, and Palermo, and Hannibal's kitchen—

Oh my god.

Will shudders and gasps, and their mouths open to each other, and he suddenly can't get enough. They've been starving for each other for so long. The kiss is both violent and tender, clacking teeth and sliding tongues, claiming, desperate. Hannibal sucks on his lower lip then slips his tongue in, and Will feels the tug of arousal down his spine. He tilts his head and their tongues meet in a shock of pleasure. (Distantly, Will's aware that both of their breath is awful, but damn if he cares.)

Hannibal's hand slides to his lower back, warming his sea-chilled skin, the other pressed against the raw scar tissue on his cheek. It's all too much—Will breaks the kiss and hangs his head against Hannibal's shoulders, staring down at the scant distance between him and his dizzying arousal, bulging obscenely against his wet boxers. The gash of his scar above his naval.

"God." Will gasps like a fish out of water, and he grips the hair at Hannibal's nape tightly. Hannibal kisses his ear, nuzzles close. He radiates satisfaction, and something darker, barely kept on its leash.

Like how he bit Will slowly.

Or how Will knew Hannibal would gut him, and Will didn't even try to get away from it.

This is their nature.

Hannibal kisses Will's neck and Will groans between clenched teeth. Will yanks him back by the hair, pushes him to the sand and straddles him, puts his hand around his neck. Hannibal's eyes spear him, dark and gleaming, and he arches, like he's getting comfortable. Addam's apple bobbing above the web of Will's thumb.

He squeezes, like he's always wanted to.

Pressure on both sides of Hannibal's neck, cutting off blood.

Will is desperately aroused, and Hannibal is too, pressed against the join of Will's thigh. Will presses a hand against himself, squeezes, pants in shivering pleasure as Hannibal's face turns red. Will says Hannibal's name like a curse and strokes himself hard and fast beneath the band of his underwear.

He doesn't remember if he's ever been so desperate to come.

Hannibal's eyes flutter, blink open. A vein rises on his cheek. His hands roam over Will's hips to the smile of his scar, and Will loses it.

He comes like his body is being shattered in a thousand pieces, like one of Hannibal's teacups, irrevocably broken. His vision whites and swims in the golden sand, and Hannibal gasps for air. Will looks down at his own hand, loosening on Hannibal's neck. He needs, suddenly, to see Hannibal come too, so he moves back on his thighs and presses his palm to his groin. Hannibal hisses and squirms away, a damp, sticky spot under Will's palm.

"Fuck," Will says, all eloquence leaving him. "Did you…?"

Hannibal nods, swallowing his sore neck. “It’s been quite some time since I was touched with anything but restraints,” he says, panting.

They catch their breaths. Will can’t stop looking at Hannibal, but he also doesn’t know what to do with *this*. He stands up, and Hannibal lets him go back to the water to wash the sand from his skin.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

“When you’re capricious, blood spills.”

“And you bring out my impulsive side.”

“I’m not asking for a guarantee. This ends in mutual destruction or one of us eating the other.”

Will struggles with the idea of intimacy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“This tops all your other cooking,” Will says after the first worshipful bite of fish, and quickly devours more. It tastes like living itself, and Will finally understands Hannibal’s appreciation of food. Starvation has given him perspective.

Hannibal smiles, equally enraptured by their food. In his own way, he’s been giddy with happiness since they returned to the beach, almost smug. “Limitation can breed superior results,” he says.

“We’ll make a kingdom out of nothing here,” Will replies.

They finish their meal in silence, not wanting it to end but desperate to fill their bellies. They exchange glances heavy with meaning and speculation, Hannibal waiting to pounce, Will reluctant to step forward. He needs time to think, and Hannibal seems willing to give it to him.

Their relationship is sexual now.

Will can feel Hannibal’s desire and affection for him like a beam of light that will surely blind him if he looks too close. Will is attracted to him, and wants him with the dizzying consummation they know so well. But Will feels himself closing up like a clam, locking down defenses and distance to his heart—because he can’t just give Hannibal the last thing he doesn’t have.

Hannibal has his teeth in Will’s mind and heart. Giving him his body feels like it will kill him.

They don’t touch. There’s still plenty of hours of light to the day, so Will works on repairing the fish trap, and after digesting, Hannibal continues to forage. Will walks to the stream to

refill their jug, spending a while there filling his belly with water and resting on the banks.

A light rain begins to fall, and Will seeks refuge under the thick growth of a tree. His bare feet and shoulders ache from the exertions of the day. The distance and time away from Hannibal has done little to ease the lump in his throat.

Will didn't think it was possible to be closer to Hannibal, but this new avenue is as exhilarating as it is terrifying. This intimacy will be difficult. It will hurt. Just like the times before. And even if he wants it, Will still has a choice. He always has.

If they continue, what will be be left that is solely Will?

Boundaries—Will spent three years building a version of himself untouched by Hannibal. Then it all came crashing down, so easily. If Will keeps nothing from Hannibal, he will be totally subsumed. He might as well be dead.

The anxiety builds throughout the day. Will doesn't speak much, and finds ways to keep himself busy away from Hannibal. Hannibal doesn't push him, and part of Will wishes that he would. He feels like he's drowning.

After their dinner, a smaller fish Will caught and half a dozen urchins and snails, Will stares at the fire. Hannibal watches him. Darkness falls.

"Try to relax, Will," Hannibal says eventually. Will glances over at him—he rests back on his hands, at ease, firelight dancing over his features. He doesn't seem bothered by Will's anxiety.

Will realizes that his shoulders are stiff by his ears and rolls them, wincing at a spike of pain.

"Can I offer you another massage?" Hannibal asks, without innuendo.

Will feels the same lump rise in his throat. "I'm not sure that would be a good idea."

Hannibal cocks his head. "The results have been positive so far."

"I know you've enjoyed yourself," Will says bitterly.

"And you haven't?"

Will sighs and rubs a hand over his face. "My enjoyment is coupled with anxiety. I'm in uncharted waters."

"You still have the stars to guide you," Hannibal says. "We can make our own map."

"It's difficult to know where to start."

It's as much an invitation as hesitation. Hannibal moves to Will's side of the fire and sits besides him on the loamy ground. Will stiffens, and for a blinding moment hates himself for it, and then Hannibal's hand is between his shoulders. Will doesn't look at him or move.

“Nothing stands between you and your desires,” Hannibal says, massaging the back of Will’s neck. His nails rake up and down the curls at his nape, and it feels good, but not enough for Will to relax. “Nothing besides yourself.”

“This isn’t easy for me,” Will bites out.

Hannibal tenses for a moment, and Will’s stomach knots, feeling the rejection as if it were pointed to himself. But Hannibal sounds composed as he says, “We needn’t do anything you don’t want to do.” He squeezes Will’s neck and then withdraws until his hand is merely resting, innocently, on his shoulder.

Will glances sidelong, catching Hannibal in his periphery. “You want to touch me.”

Hannibal takes an anchoring breath, his face hovering close over Will’s shoulder. “Yes.”

Will’s stomach flutters. “You can,” he says quietly, because while the prospect intimidates him, he can’t let Hannibal out of his reach. Maybe he wants Hannibal to catch him.

Hannibal’s breath is warm against Will’s ear, and for a moment he brings their heads together, and the closeness grows tense. “And you can tell me to stop,” Hannibal says.

Will smiles at the absurdity of that. “Is that all it took, all this time?”

“If you are mine to take, then I am also yours.” Hannibal sighs deeply. “Don’t misunderstand me, Will, I have no desire to harm you as I have before.”

Will doubts that is entirely true, but he doesn’t want to argue with Hannibal. So he looks towards the fire. Hannibal doesn’t kiss him or claim him, but adjusts so he’s sitting behind Will and begins to work out the knots in his shoulders. God, does Will need it. Survival is hard work, and his body carries years of unresolved trauma. Hannibal forces his body to relax with steady hands, and while Will can’t quite bring himself to enjoy it fully, he is grateful.

Hannibal seems to know when Will’s muscles are too sore to continue, and his hands turn soft, stroking down Will’s back and sides. Will leans back into his warmth, and Hannibal noses the join of his neck, hands on his hips.

“Let’s go to bed,” Hannibal says, sending chills down Will’s spine.

“Okay,” Will says, sounding skeptical of what will come next.

They retire to the shelter, Will laying on his back with his hands on his stomach and Hannibal facing him on his side. Will feels all mixed up—warm and wanting and defensive and self conscious. He breathes hard through his nose, agitated.

“Goodnight, Will,” Hannibal says after a moment. He places a hand over Will’s and settles on their makeshift bed, close but not touching elsewhere.

“Goodnight,” Will says. He slips his thumb against Hannibal’s hand, wanting to reassure what he can’t put into words.

Hannibal can walk to the deck now, but after the short flight of stairs from the galley, the steeper set to the control station seems beyond him. He is cautious of his gut as he moves, which is heavy with swelling and tender, and he feels pale after the mild exercise. He had planned to go to Will in the wheel and speak to him, but the company of the sun and sea will do for now.

He sits on a bench and looks off the back of the boat. It's a glorious day, and the sun chases away the cool of the air, bright and insistent. But there isn't much to look at, and after a while Hannibal wishes he had brought his book.

The days on the boat are sedentary and cramped. He can only cook with Will's help because reaching high and lifting pots of water strains at his stitches. Mostly he reads on his kindle, and tries to sleep.

Will has not been much of a conversationalist without prompting. Hannibal has taken to reading passages to him when they're in the galley together, which Will tolerates if not enjoys. It's easy to talk about subjects which aren't themselves. But the uncharted territory between them is unspoken.

Will seems to be waiting for a strike, but Hannibal doesn't know what he'll do when the blow comes.

In a while, Will comes down from his lofty heights, and sits an arms length away from Hannibal. "The fresh air will be good for you."

"So my doctor says."

Will smirks a bit at that.

"For a long time the ocean air was thought to carry healing properties," Hannibal said. "The sick were prescribed seaside vacations."

"It's a nicer place to be sick," Will concedes.

"Salt has been used in medicine for thousands of years. Hippocrates was in particular a fan."

"Don't rub it in the wound."

Hannibal smiles. "But that's exactly what they did. It was thought to dry out infected areas."

"Are you planning on salting the wound?"

"My wounds are open to you. Are yours?"

Will thumbs the scar on his cheek with a slight frown, looking out on the water. "I had to turn you on your side, to check the exit wound."

This doesn't surprise Hannibal at all. He's sure that Will saw him all manner of nude when he was bedridden. He had to put a catheter in, after all.

Will looks at him, a spark of anger in his eyes. "I saw the Verger brand."

"Ah."

"I didn't know about that."

Hannibal shrugs. "You never asked."

"Not that there was much opportunity." The fire calms in his eyes. "What else don't I know?"

"About that night?"

Will hesitates, and nods.

"I skinned Cordell's face, then Mason's. Tacked Cordell's onto Mason's flesh with a few staples. Alana was the one who freed me. Bargained for your life."

"How do you mean?"

"That was the terms for my release: that I keep you alive."

"Would you have let me die?"

"I released my desire to eat you."

"Bad deal for her." Will frowned, then added, "No you haven't."

"But I won't."

"Because you promised Alana?"

"Because I much prefer you alive."

Will doesn't have anything to say to that. His gaze wanders back to the ocean. It's remarkable how his eyes reflect its exact color.

"Do you doubt me?" Hannibal asks.

"You're not lying to me," Will says. "But you don't know yourself as well as you think you do."

"Oh?"

"When you're capricious, blood spills."

"And you bring out my impulsive side."

“I’m not asking for a guarantee. This ends in mutual destruction or one of us eating the other.”

Hannibal’s chest swells with warmth, and he beams at Will. Will’s cheeks flush, more than from the snap of the wind. “Did you keep me alive so the meat wouldn’t spoil?” Hannibal asks, enamored.

Will shrugs. “It’s a possibility. Don’t get too excited.”

Hannibal reigns in his expression. “I’m curious what you will do. I didn’t stop you throwing us off a cliff, there’s not much I would deny you.”

“Why didn’t you stop me?” Will asks, almost so quiet that his words are taken away with the wind.

“The moment was too beautiful not to enjoy. I remember the fall, but not the impact. I did not want to die, but I thought it fitting that you would drag us into the waters.”

“You hit first.” Will’s voice sounds tight. “Broke the surface tension. I felt you fall like a rock, and I knew that if I let you go I wouldn’t find you again.”

“You could have.”

Will shakes his head slowly. “I don’t think so. Adrenaline and instincts left no room for decisions.”

“And what was it that sent us off the cliff?”

Will’s face twists. “That, I chose. Can’t live with him, can’t live without him.”

“And now that your will to destroy us was defied, you’ve surrendered.”

Will’s gaze curves around to Hannibal, steadying on him. With characteristic cruelty, and a smile, he says, “Isn’t it all you ever wanted?”

Chapter End Notes

i feel ya, Will, intimacy is tough! I'm planning on exploring that but not in a drawn out way. also I think things will ramp up next chapter :3

thanks for reading!

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

> *Will curses into the life vest, their makeshift pillow. The tightness in his chest eases, but there's still a barbed shape there, and he braces himself to be eviscerated. This surrender ends in pain. It always has.*

Chapter Notes

> it's been a sec! i've actually been sitting on this chapter and unable to upload it since it was the busiest work-time of my year. but... now i'm back!
>
> thanks for reading y'all

Sleep in their makeshift bed and shelter comes in fits and starts, a few hours of rest punctuated by aching exhaustion. Will is becoming familiar with the shades of the tropical sky at all hours in the night—and how to tell by Hannibal's breathing if he is asleep or awake.

Tonight, sleep eases the jagged edges of Will's intimacy. He wants Hannibal's warmth, and it's much easier to bridge the scant distance between them and touch the other man when he's at the edge of sleep. In the deepest dark of night, Hannibal curls towards Will's outstretched arms. In the pink edged dawn, Will presses himself against Hannibal's back, nose to his nape.

Will dreams of teeth, and the soft warmth they sink into. It feels so good that as he's waking up, he forgets where he is, and that his days are empty of the comforts he's used to.

He wakes hard, and isn't sure if he's awake or dreaming as he reaches into his pants to stroke himself. There's no room for self consciousness as he chases his pleasure. There's that smell, that warm sleepy comfort, and he wants to clutch it close.

Will blinks awake again, pressed against Hannibal's back with an arm slung around his middle. His erection slots firmly against Hannibal's rear, the same dreamy pleasure warm at the base of his spine. Will freezes at the realization. He can tell at once that Hannibal is awake too, a hand on Will's forearm. Hannibal strokes him, as if reassuring.

"Sorry," Will mutters, though he's reluctant to extract himself from this closeness. Hannibal's neck is by Will's mouth and he smells impossibly good.

“There’s nothing to apologize for,” Hannibal says with a contented breath. His grip firms on Will’s arm, and arches against him just so.

Will groans and presses his forehead tight against the back of Hannibal’s skull, aching in the too-tight confines of his trousers. The friction against his cock feels so good, but he bites his lip, resisting. “Hannibal,” he says, half chastisement, half a plea.

Hannibal brings Will’s knuckles to his mouth and kisses them. Will lingers, touching the jut of his chin and his cracked lips. Hannibal kisses his fingertips next, and Will can feel how this affects him, how pleasure and reverence swells behind his calm exterior. Will feels his teeth. He wants those teeth, in him.

Will wants everything he should not.

Will mouths at Hannibal’s neck. The bite mark is there, faded of all indentations and just a smear of a bruise. Will sets his teeth wide against the golden skin. The hitch in Hannibal’s breath and curl of his hips makes his head swim, and Will bites down, and grinds into Hannibal.

His jaws ache, his mouth is watering, and his cock throbs. Hannibal hums, soft and pliant even as Will bites down harder. He sucks on Will’s fingers lazily, tongue firm. Will releases Hannibal’s neck with a wet gasp and draws fingers from his mouth; he turns Hannibal around and searches his face.

Hannibal is relaxed, where Will is tense. He’s steady, where Will trembles. But he’s vulnerable too, putting himself in Will’s hand and under his teeth. His face is the only one Will knows, anymore, and may be the last one he will ever see.

Will strokes down Hannibal’s jaw with damp fingers. “I feel like I’m free falling,” Will says, “and I keep waiting to hit the ground.”

Hannibal’s eyes dart from Will’s to his lips, hungry. He wraps an arm around Will, pulling as close as possible while keeping eye contact. “We’ve fallen a long way together.”

“I can’t—” Will swallows. “I can’t hold back.” He’s tipping over the edge again.

And he can’t help but kiss Hannibal. One firm kiss, and then another, and then their lips are slotting together. Hannibal pulls Will flush and sucks on his lower lip, and Will melts into it. He has to taste and feel and explore Hannibal’s mouth. He licks against the wet warmth behind Hannibal’s teeth and Hannibal’s groan lights a fire under his skin.

Hannibal claws against Will’s back, pulls Will between his legs to rut. Will ends up on top of him, helplessly lost in his mouth and body. He’s painfully hard, and every thrust of his hips winds him tighter. Hannibal is filling out too, gasping when Will grinds right against him.

“Oh, god,” Will moans, and Hannibal devours the words with a biting kiss. He’s falling apart, spinning out, and this only ends in one way, doesn’t it, with blood on his hands.

“Be with me, Will,” Hannibal says against his cheek, holding him firmly by the waist. Will’s shaking too hard to keep himself up and collapses on top of Hannibal, but he doesn’t seem to mind the closeness and weight.

“I’m here,” Will says, nosing Hannibal’s cheek. “It’s too much.”

Hannibal turns them on their sides and kisses Will softly. “Hold on, darling, I’ve got you.” Will clutches Hannibal as he opens up both their pants. The he strokes Will’s erection, cups him in hand.

Will shudders and comes, orgasm tearing down his spine. Hannibal strokes him through it, purring with satisfaction, holding Will close when he twitches through the aftershocks. “Lovely boy,” Hannibal praises, eyes shining and fond.

Will curses into the life vest, their makeshift pillow. The tightness in his chest eases, but there’s still a barbed shape there, and he braces himself to be eviscerated. This surrender ends in pain. It always has.

Hannibal brings his cum-stained hand to his mouth and starts licking it clean, a look of gluttonous satisfaction on his face. It looks familiar.

Will pushes upright and away as the barb twists deeply. He feels cold, suddenly. “Have… Did we have sex before?” Will asks.

Hannibal looks surprised, then goes calculating, noticing the thread of horror in Will’s voice. The moment that Hannibal takes to decide his response is all the answer that Will needs and he feels—betrayed. Bile rises at the back of his throat.

“Will.” Hannibal reaches out to him as Will flinches back.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t want to unduly influence.”

“I don’t remember,” Will spits, venomous. “What else did you do to me that I don’t remember?”

It’s petulant, and Will knows it, but it’s hard to care with the fear rising in his gut. Hannibal goes cold in an instant, features shutting closed. Will gets out of the shelter and stalks into the forest, not giving Hannibal a chance to retort—and Hannibal doesn’t follow him.

When Will sends out his lure, Hannibal isn’t expecting it. It’s impossible to know whether the bait is an imitation or the real thing until the hook sinks in.

Will has been politely distant, showing Hannibal a surface reflection. His defenses are up, and a piece is missing between them. Hannibal can't help that feel that his loss of memory is to blame. Will knows something he doesn't, and holds it out of reach.

So it's a subtle but marked difference when Will starts relaxing around him. He allows himself to show some of the aches and pains of his recovery, yawns in Hannibal's company after sleepless nights, and his smile comes easier, even when it's a grimace. In little ways, Will invites Hannibal's touch, whether its navigating the small kitchen, or turning his back so that Hannibal might approach as close as he dares.

Will lets him closer and closer, before he retreats.

After dinner, Will is hunching his shoulder up to his ears and rolling it with difficulty, frowning deeply. Hannibal wonders if it's manipulation—but even if it is, he finds himself unwilling to resist.

"How's your shoulder?" Hannibal asks.

"Been locked up all day," Will huffs, stretching his neck to one side and then the other.

"May I?" Hannibal asks, gesturing with a hand.

Will looks skeptical for a moment, then nods. Hannibal slides closer along the bench, and Will turns so his back is facing him, one knee lifted up. Hannibal feels the knotted and swollen muscle through the fabric of his shirt, and the edge of the bandage on his collarbone. "Will you let me examine your injuries?" Hannibal asks. Will hasn't, yet, and has insisted that he doesn't need Hannibal's help with them. Hannibal finds himself frustrated that he doesn't remember all the moments of their survival together.

Will doesn't say anything for a moment, and then nods.

The bathroom is too small for this, so the medical supplies have always lived in the cabins. Will brings one of the kits out to the galley and sets it on a side table.

Hannibal pulls out a stool and Will sits in it. He shrugs out of his shirt, movement somewhat limited, and Hannibal takes it from him to fold and set aside. He does so deliberately, before turning to look at Will.

He's a bit lean and smattered with faded bruises, but otherwise looks healthy. The scar that smiles across his belly is paler than when Hannibal last saw it, and for a moment it's difficult to remain clinical. Will juts out his chin, challenging Hannibal to keep looking, or to look away.

"Let's see it," Hannibal says, referring to the stab wound under the bandage. He steps close and peels it off. The little knife that cut through Will's cheek didn't drag as wide a cut through his upper pectoral, but it was deep enough to do damage. There's not much discharge from the scab, which is a good sign. Hannibal palpates around the wound as he examines it, displeased to see signs that it has been reopened through movement. The scarring is spreading.

“You need to let it fully heal before you can return full movement of your arm,” Hannibal says. Using a gentle touch, he has Will raise his arm from his side.

“Been a little busy,” Will says with a wince.

“I’ll put you in a sling,” Hannibal warns. He stops Will’s arm where it is, perpendicular to his side. “Do you feel pulling around the wound?”

Will nods.

“Stretch it slowly. When you feel that pulling, stop.” Hannibal moves until he’s behind Will and palpates his shoulder. There are plenty of knots hindering Will’s movement as well, in addition to the old gunshot wound. He spends some time testing Will’s range of motion before laying his arm by his side.

Will’s warm skin is under his palms. Hannibal remembers the scant few moments where he has touched Will’s skin with his awareness. Precious few. He maps the contours of muscle and bone with his fingers. When he applies firm pressure to the side and beneath the knot, Will lets out a long, hard breath.

Hannibal massages the soreness away, focused on his task. But he notices too the tenor of Will’s breath as Hannibal touches him, the way he leans back and tilts his head, the scent of salt rising from his scalp, and the blend that is uniquely Will’s, smoke and capsaicin and honey. Even now, association brings with it the smell of dogs, and blood.

They are close, Hannibal’s gaze locked on the skin of Will’s neck, and how his dark hair curls tightly at the nape. Hannibal can see that his pulse is raised. He reacts beautifully to Hannibal’s touch.

“Overall, you’re healing well,” Hannibal says. “The ongoing trauma to your shoulders has lead to chronic problems with your back and neck, which will need ongoing physiotherapy to heal. I wouldn’t be surprised if some of your headaches are due to muscle tension.”

“I know,” Will says. “Pain is familiar.”

Hannibal smooths his hands down Will’s back and arms, then up to his neck, thumbing his vertebrae. “It’s more than one massage will heal.”

He makes to move away but Will catches his wrist, pulls his hand around to rest over his chest. Hannibal feels the pulse of his heart, and his breath catches in his chest. He traces the line of his collarbone and finds the dip of his suprasternal notch, where the pulse is alive just under the skin.

“You pulled me apart,” Will says quietly. “It seems right for you to put me back together.”

Hannibal smells something else emanating from Will, and his nostrils flare—the scent of arousal, hot and musky.

“What would you like me to stitch together next?”

Will drags Hannibal's hand down his chest, to the old scar wide across his abdomen. They both shudder when Hannibal touches it.

He sighs against Will's neck, looking over his shoulder and down where their hands join over scar tissue. Pleasure coils tight in his gut, and he can smell Will's arousal growing before he sees it bulging in his trousers. "Will," Hannibal says as he traces the smile. "Show me your wounds." He wanted to touch them all.

Will squeezes Hannibal's hand and removes it. "Your turn." He stands up and turns to Hannibal, eyes low for a moment, a blush on his cheeks. When he meets his eyes, they're dark and desirous.

Will sits Hannibal down to change his bandages with careful hands. Hannibal is in worse shape than Will, bruised across his abdomen from internal bleeding before the surgery, swollen still. He still had the soft drains in, though they can likely come out soon, and the stitches are looking good. Will cleans the fluid away from Hannibal's skin and applies a fresh bandage, then the wraps that prevent Hannibal from tearing the stitches or anything internal.

Will is sure and competent, his arousal dissipating even as his hands linger on Hannibal's hips. "Thank you, Will," Hannibal says, looking up at him.

Will smiles down, soft and searching. "I stitched you together, when you were fading."

"Only right for you to tear me apart."

Chapter 12

The door to Will's cabin is closed. It always is, and Hannibal has not set foot in there, respecting the request for privacy. There is so little privacy on the boat that they are careful to give each other space, although Will has been in Hannibal's cabin numerous times.

Will's cabin is one of many unsaid boundaries, and Hannibal knows when he sees the door that, today, he will cross that line.

Will is struggling. His moods swing throughout the day, and the effort he spends to hide this from Hannibal—unsuccessfully—makes him agitated. In turn, he lures Hannibal closer to him, then shuts him out. Hannibal is learning the patterns. Much like the weather, Will's moods can be scented in the air, felt in Hannibal's bones.

It becomes obvious that they are in a kind of stalemate. Will is waiting for Hannibal to make a move, and Hannibal is waiting for Will to make a decision on his own. Will provokes, but Hannibal is patient.

Will is also keeping them on the water longer than necessary. Hannibal asks after their trajectory, and Will answers vaguely. They'll reach their destination 'soon'. Hannibal doesn't have the same navigation skills as Will, but he can read the changing direction of the stars.

Will isn't ready to return to land.

Now, Will is at the wheel above the deck, and will likely stay up there until dinner. Hannibal takes the opportunity to go into Will's cabin at the head of the ship. Opening the door, he finds the cabin tidy, save for the bed, which is a mess of tangled sheets. The smell of sweat lingers in the air, a little musty. The clothes, toiletries, and basic comforts Hannibal provided are kept neat in the drawers and closet.

Hannibal sits on the edge of the bed and smoothes his hand over the sheets. The warmth has dissipated during the day, but he can imagine Will here, shifting in restless sleep, troubled still by nightmares. There is the tang of arousal in the air. Hannibal leans down to a pillow and inhales, flooding his palette with Will's scent.

He remembers, vaguely, waking from disturbed sleep to find Will laying next to him in his sick bed. The scent percolates the memory, and he closes his eyes, trying to recall more.

Fever and cold. Will struggling to put latex gloves on shaking hands. Soaking with sweat or seawater on the deck of the ship.

His hand slips under the pillow, and touches something hard and cold. Lifting the pillow, he sees a knife—and Will's wedding ring.

Rage floods Hannibal, slow and black. For a moment, thoughts find no coherent anchor, eclipsed by the ringing of his ears. It is such an intimate place for Will to hide the ring. Perhaps he wishes to dream of his past life. Perhaps he wants to cut his way back there.

Hannibal places the ring on top of the pillow, leaving the knife beneath. Then he leaves the room, and sculpts a mask over the anger.

Dinner is a quiet affair, and afterwards Hannibal retires to his room. He isn't tired, too on edge by the discovery of Will's wedding ring. Leaning against the headboard, Hannibal reads on his kindle, but his attention is following the sounds Will leaves in his wake as he moves throughout the ship.

First, in the galley, cleaning up after dinner and having another drink.

Then, later, ascending the steps to the deck. Perhaps he will stay up there all night, and the ring won't be discovered until morning.

Hannibal makes ready for bed, dressing down, brushing his teeth and washing his face. There is little discharge beneath his bandages, and tomorrow he can remove the drains. When he returns to his cabin, it is with a sense of impatience. But he reads, and the night continues.

Hannibal has drifted into a half-sleep, light still on, when he hears the shower running. He wanders the rooms in his mind, following the sound of water crashing against cliffs.

Footsteps. Hannibal isn't alone in this space.

He turns a thought and ends up in the cliff house, the sky bloody as it was before the Dragon came. Drops of liquid hit the floor, followed by wet footsteps. Hannibal follows the noise to the hall.

Will stands there, dressed as he was that night, but his clothes are soaked in sweat. The cut on his cheek bleeds profusely, soaking his sleeve, dripping down his hand and hitting the floor. The ring gleams on his finger, stained crimson.

"What did you think would happen?" Will snarls in his mind.

The door to Hannibal's cabin opens suddenly, and he blinks from his meditation. Will stands in the doorway, hair wet from the shower, dressed just in his sleep pants. His eyes burn with anger.

"You just can't help yourself, can you?" Will snaps.

Hannibal sits up in the bed. "What do you refer to, Will?"

He shakes his head. "You went into my room."

"And you're in mine."

"You went through my stuff!"

"Hardly," Hannibal says mildly. "You claim the ring isn't yours."

“Don’t play coy.” Will steps forward, tension running through his whole body. It’s an appealing sight: the clench of muscle under clean, damp skin; the wild eyes of a caged animal. “You can’t help but put your claws in everything.”

He is thoroughly provoked, and Hannibal feels the return of that black, hot anger. “Do you sleep in good company?” Hannibal asks. “Do you dream fondly of your little family?”

Will leaps at him. Hannibal’s head hits the headboard in their impact, stunning him for a moment—then Will has his hands around his throat and is snarling above him, saying, “Damn you, damn you.”

Will’s wrath makes Hannibal’s stomach go tight. It’s fierce, and glorious, and fuels his own violence like a match to gasoline. Will squeezes Hannibal’s neck like he means it. Hannibal grabs Will’s fingers with one hand, bracing that arm with the other. He works one finger free and takes it in his fist, pulling it back toward Will’s arm. Before he breaks it, Will yells and stops strangling him, punches Hannibal in the face. Then they are fighting.

Will has every advantage. It’s easy for him to pin Hannibal with the blanket between them, and Hannibal just manages to get his arms up to protect his face as Will pulls back for another blow. Hannibal tries to wrap around Will as close as possible, turn them off the bed —all he manages is to hold Will close and receive a punch in the side of his abdomen. Hannibal bites down on the meat of Will’s shoulder, near his neck. Tastes blood, and Will’s angry howl. Then there’s blinding pain in his gut wound, and Hannibal sees white.

They fall to the floor in a tangle of blankets, snarling and clawing at each other. They’re all instinct, all thundering blood and adrenaline. Hannibal gets Will beneath him, and then his wound bursts with pain again. It’s an awful, tearing sensation, impossible to ignore, and Will takes back the advantage, twisting Hannibal to his stomach and getting him in a headlock.

“Will you kill me now?” Hannibal asks in a strained voice as the air is choked out of him. “After… all your hard work… keeping me alive?”

“Damn you,” Will spits. “Fight me like you mean it.”

“You… underestimate…” Hannibal’s head feels like it’s floating. Blood thumps behind his eyes.

Will’s grip tightens around his throat. “Shut up.”

Hannibal can’t speak. He grips Will’s arm, but he isn’t trying to break the choke. He’s holding on to Will, even through this. What can he do, besides yield? Besides to stroke Will’s arm, and show him that he understands?

Hannibal blacks out for just a moment. His eyes are swimming with lights when he comes back, and he gasps for air. Will turns him on to his back, and those wandering lights part like a curtain to show Will above him. His face is flushed, his teeth bloody, and his eyes are dark and pinched with pain.

He’s beautiful.

“Stop hiding from me,” Hannibal says in a guttural voice.

Will lets out a sound of anguish. He grabs Hannibal’s shoulders and slams him against the floor—another burst of light and pain. Then he bites Hannibal’s mouth.

He doesn’t tear Hannibal’s lips off, but bites hard enough for Hannibal to flinch, then forces his tongue into Hannibal’s bloody mouth. This is a fight with different terms, and Hannibal doesn’t hold back. He tastes blood, and the heat of Will’s tongue. Will shudders out a groan above him, and kisses him rough and hungry.

Will constantly surprises him. What a wild creature.

Hannibal sinks his hands in Will’s hair, cradling that magnificent skull. He feels like a man dying of thirst, gorging himself on water for the first time—everything hits the parched core of him, flooding, shocking the cracked soil. Will’s mouth, the taste of him, the closeness, is everything he needs. And he’s so hungry.

Will lays over him, sliding between his legs, hands clawing at the fabric between them in search of warm skin. He’s shaking with desire and fury, so full of life that he can’t contain it. When they break for air Hannibal doesn’t let Will retreat, and they pant against each other’s mouths, damp with saliva and blood.

“Will,” Hannibal gasps, arching against him.

“How long?” Will asks, pained. His throat bobs. “Have you felt like this?”

“All my life.” Hannibal’s eyes burn. He’s choking again. “I’ve been missing a piece and long thought I would never find it.”

“Oh god,” Will says softly.

“You complete me,” Hannibal says, smoothing his fingers down Will’s scalp. Their eyes meet, and overflow. “You know this.”

Will groans, and kisses him again. It’s still angry, still violent, but it’s a keener blade as well, cutting Hannibal open and laying him bare. He touches Will everywhere he can reach, shoulders and spine, gripping his ribs, then waist, then hips. Will rucks Hannibal’s shirt up, tears the blanket away. They can’t stop kissing or lessen the distance between them, as if seeing them as two separate entities would be unbearable.

He feels Will’s hand slide to the warm, vulnerable skin of his groin, the join of his thigh. They both make sharp, desperate noises as Will grabs his cock, and Hannibal starts spinning out in his pleasure. “Will, I—If you—“

Will shuts him up with his lips, fists the head of Hannibal’s cock like he wants to ruin him as quickly as possible. Any veil, any suit hiding him is undone, and his spine goes molten as Will rips the orgasm from him.

Hannibal hardly recognizes the sound he makes. He clings to Will’s trembling back, their flesh wet and slick. Will is having something like a panic attack, rutting against Hannibal’s

stomach. Hannibal can smell his bitter, frustrated tears.

Will stalks off towards the river, his head buzzing. It's the desert island equivalent of slamming the door on his way out, and by the time he reaches the water he feels a bit embarrassed. He keeps running away from Hannibal, towards the water.

He sits on the bank, feet in the water, head in his hands. The intimacy between them was not fully his conscious choice, not this iteration of himself. He has no choice, after all. He and Hannibal are inevitable.

This feels uncomfortably familiar—he thinks back to the time when his memories and senses betrayed him, and when the truth was distorted in a maze of twining antlers. Hannibal broke his mind, and now Will doesn't know where one ends and the other begins.

It's unfair that Hannibal has knowledge about them that Will doesn't.

The emotions well up, and Will starts to shake. He doesn't cry, but he's so sore and tired, like he's been bled dry.

There's too much they have to do to survive for Will to sulk all day, so he bathes in the water and drinks his fill. Bugs and green growth and humid air accompany him as he walks back. They have both walked this way enough that there is almost a trail, though they haven't cut anything back to clear it beyond the press of their feet. The island has marked them, and they have marked in return.

Hannibal is gone from the camp when Will returns. For a moment, he wonders if Hannibal was ever there, and the thought is a deep throb of fear. Maybe his mind conjured Hannibal. Maybe he is actually alone. What proof does he have that Hannibal is really here?

There is a spear missing, and Hannibal usually takes one when checking the traps. That's probably what happened. Will has a count in his head of all their materials, precious as they are. He's made four spears, and three remain.

Will isn't reassured.

He fishes successfully, and scavenges in the tide pools, and the sun begins to set without Hannibal's return. Will makes the fire, and when it's going he stares at his limbs and touches his scars. It's strange to go so long without looking at a reflection.

Maybe Hannibal isn't the one who is gone. Maybe it's Will.

Without the other, he has no sense of identity.

He hears Hannibal approach before true dark, when the sky is vivid pink beyond the black trees. He emerges with what looks like a small deer carcass over his shoulders, and for a

moment Will sees the wendigo in his stead. Hannibal drops the offering by the fire and stares at Will silently.

Will gets the message. Hannibal needs to kill and provide. This is his true nature.

Will makes a gesture for Hannibal to join him, and he sits cross-legged by the fire. “Tell me what happened on the boat,” Will says.

Hannibal is quiet for a long moment. It’s like it takes some time for him to remember language. He wets his cracked lips and asks, “Have you made any attempts to recall what happened?”

Will looks towards the deer. It’s coat is reddish-brown and its legs are darker. It’s less lanky than the species of deer he knows, but it’s strange to find such a familiar animal here. “What kind of attempts?”

“Memories can be recalled in cases of retrograde amnesia,” Hannibal explains, looking more to the fire than Will. “We can find new strategies for retrieving memories. You may already have information that you don’t know how to understand.”

“It’s a big flat black,” Will says, shaking his head. “The cliff, and then… here.”

“Because the narrative is broken,” Hannibal insists. “You may have pieces, floating and lost, without context to make sense of them.”

“If you start telling me, it might make it easier to remember.”

Hannibal sighs with pursed lips, eyes flicking to Will. There’s hurt between them, but Will is having a difficult time discerning whose feelings are whose. “I can tell you what I believe happened,” Hannibal says, “But you will need to create your own perspective on events.”

“There’s something you don’t want me to know. Or you don’t want me to learn it from you.”

“We should both be careful what we wish for.”

“I can take it,” Will says.

Hannibal is silent for a moment, then nods. “Let’s prepare the meat; then I’ll tell you what I know.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Hannibal tells Will what happened on the boat.

Chapter Notes

cw: this chapter has Will remembering some violent sex (bottom hannibal). it's brief and only partially remembered, but feels dub-con to me.

Though the deer is small, processing her will take time. The rock blades are sharp but dull quickly, and Will sets about chipping more as Hannibal cuts.

Hannibal has, of course, processed plenty of game. But Will thinks he doesn't usually skin them. He starts by removing the head, cutting through skin and muscle to expose the atlas joint, then using the hammer rock to separate it. They will keep the brains for the tanning solution.

Next, he removes her hind and front legs at the knee. Hannibal cuts from knee to stomach, exposing and then fishing out the tendons, which they use to hang her from a tree. Then Hannibal gets his fist between her skin and thigh, and begins to pull the hide down. It's physical work, and Will can't help but stare from where he tends the fire—rippling muscle, tearing flesh, the bright gleam of blood and fat in the firelight.

When the hide is free, Hannibal folds it on the loamy ground so that only the outside is exposed. Sweat shines on his neck and mattes the fabric of his shirt to his chest. Will feels enflamed by the sight. Hannibal's graceful hands, cutting the organs free.

Hannibal brings the organs to the fire, and sits with his legs crossed.

"My own memories directly after the fall are hazy," Hannibal says, his voice rough from disuse. His fingers slide over a spleen, testing the flesh. "I was worse off than you, and became infected."

Will is silent for the time being, watching as Hannibal massages the small deer heart and pulls it into two lobes. His eyes are sharp points of wet light, settled in the flames. "You took care of both of us for those first weeks."

"Where did the boat come from?" Will asks.

Hannibal's eyes flick to him. "Chiyoh. She didn't stay."

Will suspected as much. He imagines clambering onto the boat, supporting Hannibal's unsteady weight. He would have looked to Chiyoh for help as they both bled onto the deck, and she would have refused, her parting gift their vessel and the barrel of a gun.

"You took us south," Hannibal continues, preparing the organs in a boat of bamboo and settling it over the fire. "We licked our wounds, and circled each other cautiously."

His words stirr Will's imagination; or perhaps memories faint and out of place. "Something went wrong."

Hannibal smiles and turns the organs over. "What would you expect of two wounded predators sharing a cage? Bark and bite, dear Will."

"Tell me," Will insists.

Hannibal sighs with his lips closed. When he looks at Will, it's like he's searching for something forgotten that only emerges in the fireside night. "You tried to kill me," he says.

Will's chest goes tight. He understands that Hannibal isn't talking about their dive off the cliff, and that this was altogether different. But it takes a moment for Will to believe him. He doesn't want to kill Hannibal; he was desperate for Hannibal to be alive when he first landed in the beach. "What did you do?" Will asks.

Hannibal spreads his hands. "What could I do that you haven't already forgiven or condemned? I did nothing, Will. It seems you were displeased with our survival." His eyes are sharp and Will feels cold beneath them.

"I don't want you dead," Will says slowly.

"You were quite undecided about that."

"Did I… hurt you?" Will hasn't noticed any suspicious wounds on Hannibal, but they were both quite battered when they reunited. God, what did he do?

Hannibal gives a little shake of his head. "You always know how to be exceptionally cruel." Then he turned his attention back to their food to let Will sit with this new information.

He had tried to kill Hannibal. Truthfully, when he first saw him on the beach his instinct had been to wrap his hands around his throat. Will had many instincts. His hands remember the ache of violence, and he clenches them, feeling the rough, marked skin of his palms.

Will can't live without Hannibal. He knows this. He would not have expected to go on. After killing Hannibal, he would have walked into the water.

Hannibal takes their food from the fire and puts it in halved coconut shells. The liver is tender, the heart tough, too hot to eat at once. He remembers the rocking of the boat, and thunder.

“Tell me, Hannibal,” Will says again. “How did we get here?”

“You drugged me,” Hannibal says, and Will sees the words form in his mouth as he says them. “And then you tried to eat me.”

Will closes his eyes. Hannibal’s words float and shimmer in his mind.

”I got free. Our fight took us to the deck, but you had sailed us into a storm.”

Will tells himself he doesn’t remember. But he can recreate it.

Will takes the heart in both hands, and bites down.

Bloody juice floods his mouth. He eats. He wants to live.

And Hannibal hunted for him, killed for him, and fed him—so that they can live.

Once their bellies are full, the rain starts down softly. Will takes Hannibal into their shelter and lies them down face to face, cups his neck. Hannibal shivers and turns warm under his hand, touches Will’s wrist.

“I don’t just want to hurt you,” Will breathes. Hannibal’s beard is growing thick, and Will skims it with his thumb, finding the soft spot under his chin. “And I don’t want to die.”

Hannibal’s eyes flutter and he leans into Will’s hand. “Live with me, darling.”

“I am.”

Hannibal takes Will’s waist in hand and they draw closer. “Don’t—” Will starts, gasping at their proximity. “Don’t let me pull us over again.”

“Never.” Hannibal brushes his lips over Will’s mouth, and his grip gets tight. “You’re not getting away from me again.”

Hannibal kisses him, sweet and warm, the taste of flesh on his tongue. Will feels too full, to bursting, like he can barely breathe but he couldn’t stand if Hannibal ever stopped. Never let him stop touching him.

And Hannibal is drowning too. Will can feel him cracking apart.

Is this remembering?

Will has the narrative now and the pieces slot into place.

He's dreaming with his stomach to the sand, the ocean dragging over him, pulling into a deeper, drugged sense of awareness. Waves. Spinning. Upright now on the deck of a boat and still helpless to go anywhere but where the tide takes him.

"I am trying to make sense of an impossible situation," Will says, the sea and deck dark around him, before him the brilliant interior of the cabin. "I am the captain of this vessel. I know her and her cargo intimately."

He steps down into the main cabin. In the galley, a long table is laid out, resplendent with food, flowers, and sea creatures. Hannibal sits at the head of the table, wrists strapped to the chair.

"It's easy to use your own medicine against you," Will says, fingers trailing on the table as he rounds it. "A prick of the needle when you're least expecting it. A barb in the bait."

Hannibal's eyes are black and fathomless.

Thunder cracks. There's a scalpel in his hand. "I'm going to consume every piece of you and then take us to the bottom of the ocean. This is my design."

The boat tips and his memories spill across the deck. Hannibal is beneath him, sleep clothes half torn off, chest heaving. Will slips his fingers into his gut wound and Hannibal arches back and moans.

"How do you want me?" Hannibal asks, husky and in his ear as Will presses his fingers deep into his heat. "Do you need me to fight back? Must this hurt, too?"

"I'm going to have all of you. Take everything from you."

"You have it."

Will fights dirty, with his words, with his tongue. It's awful but he can't stop. He fucks Hannibal roughly against the floor and knows he's going to kill him.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Clear waters after a storm.

Chapter Notes

we're approaching the end! thanks for reading and commenting <3

Will sleeps horribly, pulled deep by nightmares and jerking awake in Hannibal's arms. It feels like his mind is on fire again and thoughts rush uncomfortably beneath his skin—disgust at himself, fear at what he is capable of, that old dance of shame and desire.

"Rest," Hannibal beseeches him, soothing fingers through his hair. How is he so precious, this awful monster of his?

Will has known for so long, hasn't he—longer than he dares to admit—that he does ache for him.

When the morning light comes, Hannibal insists Will try to rest longer, and he is too tied to protest. He listens as Hannibal prepares the meat for drying; feels fevered as his mind turns that tableau into one altogether more intimate and strange. Even in the relative shade, Will gets too warm and keeps waking, sticky and weak.

Eventually he pulls himself out. The sun is higher, and Hannibal is at the edge of the beach, the thin strips of meat drying in the sun on an improvised rack of sticks. He's made a small fire, smoke keeping the flies away, and the hide is spread before him. His shirt is elsewhere, scar bared. As he leans to rub the hide, his ribs emerge along his back, and Will winces.

"Let me help," Will says, and kneels in the sand.

Hannibal has mixed the brain with salt water. The hide is scraped of meat and fat, and feels slick under Will's wet hands as he rubs the salt in. It's good, to work on this together. Hannibal is calm and clear as the waters before them.

Will wants to touch the inside of Hannibal's skin like this. He guesses that the feeling is mutual.

When the hide is done and there's nothing left but to let everything bake in the sun, Will is filled with the need to touch Hannibal. "Come swim with me," he says, a little shy.

"Of course."

Hannibal strips out of his pants and underwear and Will does the same so he's not caught looking. He can look though, and touch too. Overheated, he leads Hannibal to were the sand gets dark and ocean foam laps over their feet. He lets himself look when they're past the cresting waves. He's never seen Hannibal like this, raw and animal, eyes black as a shark. His hair is long, beard grown thick and spotted with so many different colors, skin lined and rough, but still so beautiful.

Hannibal swims right up to him and Will's breath catches in his chest. He slides his palms up Hannibal's lean arms and to his neck, Hannibal's eyes going impossibly sharp at the touch. He holds Will's ribs, and they float so close, feet sunk into the sand below.

"You know how badly I need you," Will says, daring to voice it aloud.

"Terribly, I think." Hannibal leans in and presses his nose to Will's neck. Lips and beard scraping.

"Oh, it's awful."

Hannibal kisses his neck and licks the salt there. "Darling boy."

That takes some of the fear out of him. "I'm hardly a boy," he complains.

"No," Hannibal concedes. "But you are precious to me."

Will's hands tighten on his shoulders. "I—I know." It's easy to curl his face into Hannibal's neck, to be so close they can't see each other. "It's the same for me."

Hannibal pulls him closer, so their chests are flush and legs tangled. Will can feel Hannibal's soft cock press against his thigh, warm and vulnerable. Soft kisses press down his collar. Will lets his hands go lower, brushing the scar on Hannibal's back, tracing the long line of his spine. Hannibal's kisses get wetter, wider, and then his teeth scrape.

Will's breath gets heavy. "Did we really…"

Hannibal pulls away enough to look at him, and Will thinks he's bracing himself for rejection. "Have intercourse? Yes."

Will keeps touching him, but it's hard to keep his gaze. "I think I remember."

"It was just once."

"Ok. That's… new for me."

"I know. As I said, there is no script we need to follow."

“You’ve had your hands in me before.”

That shouldn’t be dirty talk, but god, it is. The space between them is charged again, and Hannibal looks less defensive, his voice rough as he says, “I have.”

Will raises a hand to Hannibal’s jaw. “I want so much more.”

“You can have it.”

Will brushes his thumb over Hannibal’s bottom lip. With a little prodding his mouth opens, pliant, pink and wet. Will touches sharp teeth, and when Hannibal’s tongue nudges him he presses down. Hannibal’s eyes shine. He lets Will in, two fingers now, then seals his mouth and sucks.

“Jesus,” Will hisses. He pulls his fingers back and paints Hannibal’s lips with saliva. Hannibal wants a kiss, so Will gives it to him. The taste of his mouth makes him go so hot.

“I get so overwhelmed,” Will says against his cheek.

“Yes. It makes you irresistible.” Hannibal kisses him softly.

Will gets lost in the kiss and the rise and fall of the waves. And touching Hannibal. Hannibal makes a noise that fascinates him when Will thumbs the inside of his hip bone, and he keeps rubbing there, feeding on the small tells of pleasure. Stuttering breath. A caged hum in his chest. And the not so small tell of his erection, teasing Will’s stomach.

Then, Will can’t resist curling his hand around him. He feels so good—slick satin around a hard, throbbing core. “Will,” Hannibal pleads with him.

Will is feeling wicked, so he meets Hannibal’s gaze and says, “I want you to make us even. Please.”

Hannibal snarls and fists his hand in Will’s hair, stinging. “Such a cruel siren,” he hisses.

“I mean it,” Will says with a gasp. Hannibal wants that, so badly that it makes Will shudder with fear. But just because he fears it doesn’t mean he doesn’t want it. “Are you just going to let me do whatever I want to you?”

That seems to vex Hannibal more. Will gets it. He’s all tangled up by this too. He stops stroking Hannibal and slides his hands up his chest, and after a moment Hannibal relaxes. Will just leans his head against his shoulder.

“I think you’re exhausted,” Hannibal says. “And that we both need to eat.”

“That’s true,” Will mumbles. Neither move to detangle themselves. Will looks up and finds Hannibal still swamped in desire for him. “You told me I can have what I want. Well, I want you. I want sex. It can be however you like, alright? I want it to be what you want, too.”

“Will…” Hannibal looks overcome, and so beautiful. “Alright, my darling.”

It's a little easier to relax about their physical intimacy with that said aloud. Will has put himself back in Hannibal’s hands, and feels settled with it, more than he expected.

They eat so well today. The scraps that aren’t cooked or dried get put into their traps, meat to catch meat. When Will is done with that, he helps disarticulate and clean the bones—while small, he’s sure he can carve some tools and hooks out of them.

By night the jerky isn’t fully dry yet but might be after another day in the sun, and they problem solve the best way to store it overnight so bugs or critters won’t get to it. They end up wrapping the jerky in leaves and hanging it from a tree, which uses most of their rope, but they don’t want it to fall. It’s imperfect, and Will starts thinking of weaving baskets.

After a late dinner his stomach is full to bursting, almost painful, so he lies down in the tent. After putting out the fire, Hannibal crawls in behind him and puts a hand on his hip.

“I ate too much,” Will complains. Hannibal fits so well behind him, chest to back and legs bent in harmony.

“Good,” Hannibal says, voice warm with pride. He slides his hand up under Will’s shirt and feels the slight bulge under his ribs. “You need fattening up.”

“So do you,” Will says, legs tensing. Hannibal’s breath and words are right by his ear, and his hand shifts lower, finding the warm soft skin by Will’s waistband.

Hannibal jerks him off slow, slower than all their rushed kisses and biting pleasure. He almost seems to be experimenting, paying close attention to all of Will’s reactions. It’s lazy until Will is clenching and tense, rubbing back on Hannibal’s erection because that is somehow as hot a brand as his gaze. “So good, so good,” Will says, when it gets to a point he wants to last forever. He’s embarrassingly wet in Hannibal’s fist, twitching, and when he comes it’s with a litany of, “yes, yes, yes!”

Hannibal doesn't let him run away this time, and sleep is good, in his arms.

Food becomes less of a pressing concern. They have to work for it every day, but they’re not starving for it every day. They find ways to keep food and start gathering more; the traps are plentiful with better bait; and usually something is drying into jerky. Hannibal can get more creative with their meals, and both their bodies and digestion improve measurably.

So Will focuses on finding ways to make their days more comfortable. A bladder becomes a waterskin. Bones into knives, needles and utensils that double as toothpicks. He finds a good leaf that can be stripped into fibers and twisted into twine, and others that are dried and make good strips for weaving. God, weaving takes forever, but then they have a basket of sorts to gather and keep food.

Their bed is a pretty miserable situation. Will remakes it higher off the ground, with a lashed bamboo frame. That makes it warmer at night, though they are not too worried about the chill

unless it rains. Summer is a blessing.

Hannibal is making alchemy: boiling sea water down for salt, crushing nuts and berries into paste, coconut oil. That process takes a whole day, of grating the meat against a rock, squeezing it out in water, boiling. Part of Hannibal's pant leg gets sacrificed into a sieve. Cloth is such a luxury, and their clothes are growing so worn.

Hannibal also figures out a way to clean their teeth, by chewing on a twig to produce bristles, mixing a little charcoal from the fire. "How does my mouth taste now?" Will asks, and Hannibal does a thorough exploration.

Will also spends time in the water, remembering. He doesn't tell Hannibal what he's doing but he probably doesn't have to. With the waves over his head and his lungs aching for air, the pieces make themselves known. They have already been inside him, waiting.

When the hide is done tanning, Hannibal drapes it on their bed, strips Will naked and lays him down on it. It feels so good against his skin, far better than the vegetation below, and Will rubs his face against the soft fur. The smell is good too, clean and animal. "We'll need more of these," Will says, for it was a small deer they both can't fit on it, but he gets distracted looking over his shoulder—Hannibal framed by firelight and slipping out of his clothes.

Hannibal lays on his back, covering him with skin. Will gasps at the pleasure of it. "You're so beautiful, mylimasis," Hannibal says, honey sweet, and kisses his neck.

"What's that word?"

"Lithuanian." Another kiss. "For *beloved. Darling.* " Hannibal sits back on Will's thighs, leaving a shiver of cold behind, but when his hands return to Will's back they are slick and warm.

"Oh, you are the devil," Will groans as Hannibal gives a slow massage. He stretches out and relaxes into it, fingers curling, sighing at the glide of pressure on either side of his spine. It feels so luxurious.

There's no question to Hannibal's intent with this massage. His nails burn against skin, and swirling fingers reach beneath to find Will's nipples and tease. He massages Will's ass and the top of his thighs, pulling groans deep from his chest, thumbs putting pressure on nerves Will wasn't aware of. Hannibal's hands are rough but graceful, sliding with the oil, gripping so hard Will feels his cheeks spread.

Hannibal gives a murmur of appreciation for what he sees of Will. Will's blush is a tingling fire under his cheeks—it's a raw pleasure to be exposed under Hannibal's hands, as keen as any knife. He feels fingers slide and press, then return to stroke and massage, either teasing or getting him used to it—both, maybe. It blisters.

"Alright, Will?"

“Yeah.” He rocks a little pressure onto his trapped cock, the fur soft and tingling. Hannibal rubs fingers over his entrance, and it makes Will yearn fiercely. “Kiss me?”

Hannibal hauls him up on hands and knees and bends over to find his mouth; deep, sucking kisses, like they can’t bear to part for air. Will ends up twisted on his side, knee bent high, and whimpers when Hannibal presses his finger in.

“That’s it. Relax for me.”

“Trying.” Will grunts at the warmth of sensation. It feels so vulnerable, the way Hannibal presses in and out, making an opening. “I can’t believe you made lube.”

“You’ll be glad I did.” Hannibal kisses his jaw, ear, nibbling with teeth. “Are you ready for me?”

Will shivers and grasps at the hair at the back of Hannibal’s neck. He answers him with the kiss, whimpering against his lips. Hannibal takes a little more oil in his fingers and slicks himself, which Will watches, covetously. There’s another stretch as Hannibal grabs his cheek and presses the head of his cock against resistant muscle—and Will is bereft—and so he opens to him.

“Oh—god,” Will hisses. He feels Hannibal press in, inside him, hot and solid. Hannibal doesn’t go too deep, but leans on his forearm to be close and kisses Will’s neck.

“You’re shaking, love.”

“It’s so much.”

Hannibal pulls all the way out of him and Will shouts in the dark. But Hannibal returns to him, and Will opens up so much more this time. He goes deep. Slick. Will has never felt like this. “Hannibal,” Will gasps. He tingles and shivers from that deep place, up his spine. Hannibal’s lips brush his and kiss sweetly, and he pushes as deep as he can.

He can tell that Hannibal is undone by this, barely restrained, but his movements are tender, like this hurts. Maybe it does for them both. There’s so much jagged territory between them, scar tissue that hasn’t healed properly. Tears prick Will’s eyes, and he tastes salt on Hannibal’s cheek. But they are all salt these days, burnished by the ocean.

Hannibal moves through him in rolling waves, thrusting deep, and Will holds him so close that they share breath. Their foreheads pressing together, nose to cheek. Will feels too much —the sharp desire of Hannibal’s quiet moans, the wet slap of their skin when Hannibal’s thighs meet his, their covetous hands. And there’s a deep, tense pleasure growing in his core. He’s inside him. Will consumes him.

“More,” Will hisses, feeling on the brink of frenzy.

Hannibal fucks him harder, faster, sounding pained. It’s not enough, because it hasn’t destroyed them yet. Will twists more onto his stomach and uses his knee to thrust back on Hannibal’s cock and is split open. Hannibal snarls and pounds into him, violent now, but all

the more loving for it. Will feels the impact in his chest. “Fuck,” Will whines between the breaths punched out of him. “Don’t stop.” It’s too much, but he won’t take any less.

Hannibal lifts him onto both knees and palms Will’s cock. “Will—never.”

He does slow, though, in a minute, catching his breath. Will can feel every inch of him sliding in and out, and that’s what makes him lose it. He shakes with a sob, muscles tense and trembling. Hannibal squeezes and twists the head of his cock exactly like he’s learned Will likes.

“Close,” Will gasps.

Hannibal folds over him, warm and protecting. “That’s it, darling. Let me see you.”

Will nods against the pelt. He’s somehow more sensitive to each thrust. He opens his eyes and looks over his shoulder, and with the fire down there’s just enough light to see the terrible love in Hannibal’s face, and Will tips over the edge.

It’s a long fall down.

Stomach tumbling.

Hannibal right in his arms.

When Will is done, Hannibal pulls out and turns him over, stroking himself furiously between Will’s canted knees. “Yes,” Will groans, nearly feeling Hannibal’s orgasm as his own as he groans sweetly and spills against Will’s stomach. Will pulls him down, their skin sweet and wet, kisses even more so.

“I love you,” Will says. “I can’t stop loving you.”

Will feels, more than hears, the deep fissure of emotion from Hannibal. It’s so obvious to him now. How did he ever find the man hard to read. “My love,” he says, holding Will tight. “How I love you.”

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